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Fedayeen Action and Arab Strategy

*by Y. Harkabi*

THE INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES  
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Y. Harkabi is a retired senior officer of the Israel Defence Forces who now teaches at the Hebrew University, Jerusalem. He has been directly concerned with the Arab-Israel conflict, in the capacity of Chief of Military Intelligence from 1955 to 1959; this is now his field of academic research. In 1968 he was a Senior Research Associate at the Institute for Strategic Studies for four months. This paper was completed in the autumn of 1968.

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# Fedayeen Action and Arab Strategy

## 1. Introduction

The object of this paper is to examine Arab *Fedayeen*\* guerrilla warfare against Israel, its guiding concepts, its role within Arab strategy against Israel, and its prospects. For the sake of simplicity, the discussion will concentrate on the *Fatah* as the main *Fedayeen* organization, though it should be stressed that the *Fatah* is only one organization among many.<sup>1</sup> However, the difference in their basic approaches has not been so marked that the use of *Fatah* as a generic term to include them all distorts the general account.

*Fatah* first developed its ideas as a reaction to a policy advocated by President Nasser, namely, that, though war against Israel was inevitable, the Arabs should first prepare themselves thoroughly, and should not precipitate a war prematurely. This policy was endorsed at the Arab Summit Meeting in 1964-65, and became the official position of most Arab governments. Thus, in order to be understood, *Fatah* ideas must be seen in the context of the Arabs' general thinking on their programme of action against Israel.

Public opinion outside the Arab countries tends to acquire its knowledge of Arab attitudes and policies from the declarations of Arab leaders. However, these declarations are only the tip of an iceberg, or an abridged expression of

theories and arguments expounded by Arabs in their political literature. In the West, Arab leaders are frequently suspected of being carried away by exuberance. Arab internal publications, being products of long deliberation, are freer from such suspicion. The opinions they present are more considered. In essence they do not differ from the leaders' position: they explain, elaborate and supplement the leaders' announcements. They can in fact serve as a fairly trustworthy guide to the thinking of Arabs on their position in the conflict. From a methodological viewpoint, the use of this literature as the main research material has the merit that it may reveal how the Arabs themselves see their problems, how they discuss and analyse their difficulties, and especially how they grapple with their dilemmas.

The Arabs have published copious material on the Arab-Israel conflict.\* This literature deals at great length with the Arabs' basic position, the justification of their case, and why, as a matter of principle, they cannot agree to the existence of Israel. Much less space has been allotted to the problem of how to achieve their objective in the conflict, or to their programme of action. This is not unusual, for political movements tend to concentrate more on criticism of the situation they aspire to remedy, and on the elaboration of their goal, than on spelling out how it will be reached. Such imbalances can be found, for instance, in Socialism or Zionism. Marx dealt more with criticism of Capitalism than with how it would be superseded by Socialism. The main current in Zionist programmatic thinking concentrated more on how to develop assets which

\* *Fedayeen* is the name in common use in Arabic for Arab irregulars acting against Israel. This word comes from the root 'sacrifice', i.e. those who sacrifice themselves or assume a suicidal mission. Historically, this name was given in the twelfth century to those selected to assassinate the enemies of the Isma'ili sect (the Assassins). In the context of the Arab-Israel conflict the name *Fedayeen* became famous in 1955 when the Egyptian authorities organized and dispatched into Israel 'irregulars' on subversive missions.

\* There are about seven hundred books in Arabic dealing with the different aspects of the Arab position in this conflict.



would help to achieve Jewish statehood than on how the state would be brought into being.

Discussion by Arabs of the programmatic aspects of their policy towards Israel developed late, mostly in the 1960s. But they are detailed enough to enable us to analyse and portray the Arabs' thinking on their policy. The Arabs realized that preparations for the showdown with Israel must embrace a wide spectrum of activities, political, educational and military.

## 2. Preparing for War

### *Keeping the Issue Alive*

Arabs used to express their apprehension that the stagnation that afflicted the Palestinian problem for years would eventually cause its erosion. Israel would be allowed to become established, the outside world would get used to the *status quo* and the Palestinian Arabs, despairing of ever returning, would resign themselves to their fate, and would gradually incorporate themselves into the Arab countries. To counteract these trends Arabs should preserve the 'vitality' of the Palestinian problem as an unresolved issue inexorably demanding action, and ensure its 'integrality' by preventing its diversion from an issue of principle of a nation claiming back usurped land, into separate subsidiary issues such as refugees, free passage in Arab waters, diversion of the Jordan waters.

A Jordanian Government booklet, stating its position on basic national issues, exemplified these apprehensions in the following words: 'Since the end of the year of disaster [1948] the Arabs have continuously failed to animate the Palestinian problem in an orderly and courageous way that challenges the *status quo*, from the international and the local points of view. It should be remembered that if these circumstances are allowed to go on, Arab rights will gradually be eroded, the secondary component of the basic problem will be weakened and a growing part of the international community will accept the politics of the *fait accompli*'. Thus, political action has to be taken constantly to remind the world of the problem; it should be included in the agenda of international conferences. Further-

more, educational projects have to be launched in all Arab countries with the purpose of inculcating in all Arabs the conviction that the issue is central to their lives, and decisive for their private and national aspirations, so that they will be prepared to concentrate all their efforts on the struggle against Israel.

### *Education for hostility*

The theme that the Palestinian problem is of the gravest consequence for the future of *all* Arabs is constantly stressed in Arab political publications. Never before have the Arabs been so starkly exposed to danger.<sup>1</sup> Article 13 of the *Covenant of the Palestinian Liberation Organization* specifies (official translation): 'The destiny of the Arab Nation and even the essence of Arab existence are firmly tied to the destiny of the Palestine question'. King Hussein in a speech from the throne on 1 December 1962, said: 'Without Palestine, Arabs cannot possess real freedom and genuine unity or even a good life.' In other words, the existence of Israel does not allow the Arabs to achieve any of their other national objectives.

It ought to be impressed upon all Arabs that Palestine is the central issue in Arab nationalism. Mr Nasr al-Din al-Nashashibi, formerly the editor of the Egyptian daily *Al-Jumhuria* and an ambassador-at-large of the Arab League emphasized: 'We must see to it that every child in all Arab societies feels that something is missing, that something overshadows his life, threatens his existence and impairs his stability, so that his happiness cannot be complete so long as this factor continues to exist ... that is the non-existence of Filastin [i.e. Arab Palestine] and the existence of Israel on its land.'<sup>2</sup>

Irredentism should be fostered. Arabs should never be allowed to forget that the greatest injustice ever committed in history was inflicted on them.<sup>3</sup>

The Palestinian issue should become central in education, literature, art, and poetry. Thus, the Palestine Liberation Organization proclaimed at its first congress held on 22 May 1964: 'The Palestine question shall be taught to Arab students at all educational levels.'<sup>4</sup> Decisions and recommendations were actually translated into educational projects and textbooks.<sup>5</sup>



### *Preserving the Palestinian Entity*

To keep the conflict ablaze necessitates the existence of a Palestinian Arab people for whom the 'complete restoration of the lost homeland' will be achieved (Preamble to *Covenant of the PLO*). The Arab League meeting of 30 August 1960 decided 'all Arab states should preserve the Palestinian entity and avoid whatever might bring its assimilation'. Article 5 in the *Covenant of the PLO* goes further and defines the Palestinian personality as 'a permanent and genuine characteristic that does not disappear. It is transferred from father to son.' Thus, by definition, the Palestinian personality is perpetuated, and the activities of organizing the Palestinian Arabs, in order to preserve them as an entity, are described as giving only an outer expression to an inner reality.

It is true that the activities concerning the Palestinian entity were part of inter-Arab rivalries.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the organization of the Palestinians, even if instigated by some Arab states for reasons outside the Arab-Israel conflict, has its own *raison d'être*. Its importance has grown in recent years since the conflict has come to be described in some Arab quarters as embodying a 'War of National Liberation'.

To preserve the Palestinian entity was not considered simply an organizational task. It was accompanied by efforts to rewrite the Palestinians' history, presenting it as an epic of continuous struggle against the British Mandate and the Jews in Israel, and by efforts to develop a Palestinian literature, collecting Palestinian folklore, and so on.

As Israel will not resign herself to liquidation, it must be achieved by violence. The theme of the inevitability of war appeared with great frequency in Arab publications and in the declarations of Arab leaders.<sup>7</sup> The question of the preparations needed for initiating war has been dealt with at considerable length.

### *Reform of Society and achieving unity*

In the lessons drawn by Arab writers from the 1948 war, the theme that their failure was due to basic weaknesses in their society often recurs: lack of genuine unity, defective thinking, back-

ward mentality, egoism, narrow and conflicting interests, improvisations, lack of a scientific approach. (It is interesting to note that after the 1967 debacle a similar analysis of defeat as due to basic flaws in Arab society was aired by the *literati*, while the official tendency was to impute it to technical mishaps and to focus responsibility on the military command.) The Arab-Israel conflict is described not merely as a political confrontation between states, its results on the military and political levels are predicated on relative strengths and weaknesses in the social structure; it is a 'clash between civilizations'.<sup>8</sup>

President Nasser explained: 'Backwardness is the only thing that guarantees Israel remaining on our land for ever. The danger from Israel will weaken even before the decisive military battle is fought if the Arab Nation can succeed in extricating itself from the backwardness that Imperialism has imposed on it and which now the reactionaries endeavour to maintain' (22 May 1965).

All-embracing reforms are mandatory, not only political but also cultural and social. Miss Leila Kadi concludes her book: 'The Arabs will recover Palestine only in so far as they deserve it, and they will never deserve it unless they clean up their own house first.'

Mr Hasanein Heikal referred in an article to the quality, kind, and level of the preparation required: 'What is the road back to Palestine? My answer is: through buttressing Arab internal strength politically, economically, and socially.... Through reinforcing political strength in order to mobilize the greatest capacity to combat Imperialism – the main enemy. By reinforcing economic strength in order to free our resources from all shackles in order to develop them until we are in a position to meet all contingencies. By reinforcing social strength in order that our man will be free, possessing rights in his land and thus able to carry out his obligations.'

Arabs used to stress the idea that, in order to bring their numerical superiority to bear on Israel, they would have to overcome internal rivalries and unite themselves, or at least ensure co-ordination of effort. President Nasser used to announce that achieving unity was a prerequisite for success: 'Arab unity and unity of action are the roads to the liberation of Palestine and the restoration of Arab rights' (8 March 1965). Nasser persistently dwells on the theme that



history teaches that victory of the Arabs over foreign invaders always resulted from their unity.<sup>9</sup>

The idea of unification of the Arab countries occupies a central place in the writings of Arab ideologists. Unity seemed to many of them so natural and obvious that for a long period they did not discuss it in concrete terms and did not deem it necessary to spell out by what means it should be achieved, as if the aspiration for unity were alone adequate to call it into being. The consideration of its modality was viewed as mere technical subsidiary detail, and even as showing a lack of faith. Paradoxically, treating unity in a vague undelineated manner enabled Arabs to see its realization as imminent. Only a few obstacles set up by the machinations of Imperialism would have to be cleared away for a united Arab state to emerge.

As the course to unity suffered many reverses, culminating in the breaking up of the UAR, Arabs began to realize that they themselves bore at least some blame for their own disunity. This insight into the inherent difficulties lying in the road to unity made its achievement look a long drawn-out process. So long as the attainment of unity was considered imminent, it was acceptable to make the liberation of Palestine conditional on unity. However, when unity began to be seen as a long-term proposition, to advocate that unity should precede the war against Israel implied taxing the patience of the Palestinians to breaking-point.

Some of them resorted to the argument that the very liberation of Palestine would be a momentous historical event, which would bring about Arab unity and should therefore be given precedence. But then the problem of how to muster the forces needed to achieve it still remained unsolved.

For the foreign observer the question of whether unity or the liquidation of Israel should be given precedence may seem an exercise in casuistry. Yet this dilemma was a very real one in the Arabs' thinking on their programme of action. If achieving unity required a 'big push' such as a victory over Israel, defeating Israel required unity to rally the necessary forces.

To break the vicious circle and evade this difficulty, Palestinians expounded the theory that unity and the liberation of Palestine would be attained simultaneously. Article 12 of the

*Covenant of the PLO* asserts: 'Arab unity and the Liberation of Palestine are two complementary goals, each prepares for the attainment of the other. Arab unity leads to the Liberation of Palestine and the Liberation of Palestine leads to Arab unity. Working for both must go side by side.'

The formula put forward by the PLO is only a verbal one. It remains to be seen how *Fatah* treated this problem.

### *Military Preparedness*

According to Mr Heikal, President Nasser said in a UAR cabinet meeting in November 1959: 'When I initiate war I want to be able to achieve one, and only one, result and nothing less – namely, decisive victory. Anyone can bring about war, but only the victor can terminate it according to his desire. I know that the Arab nation does not want an adventure this time, but a victory. I shall not permit the initiation of war unless I am capable of developing it into an all-out war against the enemy and against all support which may be sent to him, and achieve sure victory.'

The objective of liquidating a state by war requires that such a war be total, and speedy, so that decisive results can be achieved before there is time for intervention from outside. Professor Walid Khalidi elaborated these ideas in a lecture in which he explained that the Arabs should launch against Israel a surprise total *Blitzkrieg*: 'The limited war does not suit us, as partial victory would not entail a final settlement of the situation but probably its stagnation.' Baha al-Din expressed himself similarly: 'The only possibility for the success of a military operation for liquidating the existence of Israel as a state is a *Blitzkrieg* [*Harb hatifa*] which will put an end to the whole issue in a few days or a few hours.'<sup>10</sup>

The object of a total and instantaneous defeat of the enemy imposes conditions on the level of forces required. Furthermore, provision has to be made to deter intervention from outside. Nasser said in the UAR National Assembly on 26 March 1964: 'When we decide to initiate a war against danger from Israel we have to consider clearly the



dimension of the campaign and its range, and we must provide for more than is needed to confront Israel alone. We shall need a force capable of facing those who are supporting Israel, or at least one capable of neutralizing them.'<sup>11</sup>

Arabs have dealt at length with the problem of preventing outside intervention from limiting their freedom of action in a victorious war against Israel. They analyse their ability to accomplish such a goal as depending not so much on Arab military power, but rather on the activation of the political assets in their hands. Arabs describe their means of exerting pressure and leverage as emanating from the following major factors: the strategic position of Arab territories, oil, and the Arab weight, numerically and politically, in world politics. It is interesting to note that not only hundreds of articles, but complete books, have been concerned with the subject of the overwhelming power of the Arabs to bring influence and pressure to bear. Surprise has often been expressed as to why, with such assets, the Arabs could not prevail over their adversaries.<sup>12</sup>

### *The Long Road*

The achievement of a reform of Arab society and some unification, and the mustering of the necessary forces – requirements which were described as a precondition for launching a total war against Israel – will necessarily extend over many years of great national effort. Consequently, the road to victory is a long one.

Some Arabs forwarded the view that the Arab-Israel conflict is a long historical confrontation between two societies, two cultures, and that only a new vigorous generation of Arabs will be able to fulfil the task of liquidating Israel. Mr Saib Slam expressed himself in this vein only a short time after the 1948 War: 'It is true that Israel is doomed. I believe it and every Arab who desires life has to believe it. However, the annihilating strike which will befall Israel will not come from the present generation which failed so dismally and revealed its feebleness at the time of the formation of Israel when she was weak. This generation kneels under the burden of poverty, sickness, ignorance and feeble faith. The generation to whom the mission of liquidating Israel will be entrusted will be a generation educated for this task.'

President Nasser emphasized the need for long preparation and patient waiting until propitious circumstances came about. He had an almost continuous dispute with the Syrians who urged the start of operations of attrition against Israel. In a most important speech on 26 June 1962, he said to a delegation of councillors from Gaza: 'I do not agree with becoming involved in semi-military operations. If we were engaged in such operations how could we guarantee that Ben-Gurion would also be engaged in semi-military operations?'<sup>13</sup> I can persuade myself but I cannot persuade Ben-Gurion. Hence, when I take a decision I have to be sure that I can impose such a decision on my forces and that they can gain the upper hand over Ben-Gurion as well as the people who are backing Ben-Gurion. Otherwise, I would be gambling with the fate of my country and I would be exposing it to another disaster similar to that which occurred in 1948.

'I mean to say that conducting semi-military operations and going to war without adequate preparation is a political swindle. Whoever says that we should go to war without getting ready for it, is a traitor to his country and his people and is a gambler who gambles with the fate of his country and his people. War is not fought by means of high-sounding words. War involves the fate of countries and it is a matter of life or death.'

This statement foreshadows the discussions between Syria and Egypt in the years 1965-66 on the value of guerrilla warfare as a weapon against Israel.

Nasser drew some consolation from the history of the Crusades. He reminded his audience that it took about seventy to eighty years to drive out the Crusaders, adding that the Arab national character had been historically endowed with both perseverance and patience and that this time final victory for the Arabs was also assured.<sup>14</sup>

The time factor, he emphasized, favoured the Arabs as Israel would not for long be able to continue an arms race with the Arabs.<sup>15</sup> Arab superiority in manpower and resources would eventually ensure victory for the Arabs.

### *The Dilemma*

Until the six-day war, Arab thinking about war against Israel was beset by a grave dilemma.



Delaying war until preparations assuring absolute victory were completed meant allowing the *status quo* to acquire growing international recognition, and enabling Israel to consolidate her existence. Furthermore, the struggle against Israel would lose its main *raison d'être* as the disheartened Palestinians, despairing of ever regaining their country, would disperse and cease to constitute a people for whom a land must be redeemed. On the other hand, to precipitate a premature war might court disaster, by a defeat, and at least a setback to the national purpose, entailing further delays.

The Arabs' considerations of their action against Israel have essentially been attempts to deal with this dilemma. There was a striking consensus among effective Arab public opinion on the objective of the destruction of Israel as a political entity. It has been universally described as a national imperative.<sup>16</sup> This homogeneity of attitude disappeared when they came to consider the ways of achieving the objective. The heterogeneity of trends and interests of the Arab subgroups is reflected in differences in the degree of intensity of their commitment to the objective of liquidating Israel and, more so, in their divergences on choice of means.

Though President Nasser warned against provoking premature war, it is no accident that he himself did not heed his own warnings. As the years passed, he became more and more convinced that the UAR Armed Forces had made decisive headway towards a stage that would ensure victory in a showdown. He felt the need to demonstrate to his people and to his Arab critics that time had been efficiently used and that the UAR, as the champion of Arab nationalism and the struggle against Israel, was steadily developing her armed strength to the level enabling her to achieve the goal. Statements to this effect were made from time to time.

Nasser, it seems, in the mid-1960s, considered the weakness of Syria and Jordan to be the main obstacle to defeating Israel, whereas the UAR already had achieved sufficient military strength. (That he may have had political interests in saying so, does not exclude the possibility that he believed it.) As reported by Salem Al-Luzi, the editor of the Lebanese pro-Egyptian weekly *Al-Hawadeth* (23 March 1966), Nasser said: 'Had the front been united and prepared, we could have liquidated Israel in twelve days and

not in the two hours as Amin al-Hafiz pretended. We think that Israel can be attacked only from the Jordanian and Syrian front. But if the situation in these countries is not stable, and they are not capable of waging a war, and if we in Egypt cannot be confident that our rear is defended, as in the 1948 war, it will be a second version of the Palestinian war.'

Furthermore, Nasser, even if he put off an event so momentous as the war to liquidate the enemy state, and even if he made historical allusions to the Crusaders, would tend psychologically as a statesman, to see the delay limited to the time in which he would still be in power. One can surmise that he hoped that he was destined to achieve such a victory which would crown his career. Even if rationally he considered the waiting period to be long, yet hope and national pride gained the upper hand, as demonstrated by his actions and words prior to the six-day war.

### 3. Fatah's Doctrine

#### *Introduction to Fatah*

Like other similar movements, *Fatah's* beginning was modest and is shrouded in obscurity. Naturally there is now a trend to romanticize its history. A group of Palestinians used to meet in the Gaza Strip after its occupation by Israel in 1965, and discuss how to combat Israel. They were disillusioned by the Arab states' inability to regain Palestine, epitomized in Egypt's failure in defending the Gaza Strip. They came to the conclusion that the Palestinians had to take their destiny into their own hands and start harassing Israel. Yasser 'Arafat, *alias* Abu 'Ammar, who had previously been connected with the Moslem Brotherhood in Egypt and consequently had to flee from Egypt in 1954, became their leader. He toured the Palestinian diaspora preaching his gospel and recruiting members for his organization. Cells were set up in Kuwait and among Arab students in West Germany, and training was started in Algeria. From 1959 its ideas were given some publicity in a monthly of limited circulation, produced in Beirut and entitled *Our Palestine*.

The organization called itself '*Fatah*' which



is the reverse initials of 'Movement for the Liberation of Palestine'. *Fatah* means in Arabic 'conquest', and in this name there is probably reassuring allusion to a famous Koranic verse, 'Assistance from God and imminent conquest [or victory]' (LXI, 13).

The Syrians gave the movement support, and its headquarters were set up in Damascus. The Syrian Intelligence provided it with training facilities, weapons, financial assistance. In January 1965, *Fatah* started its first subversive action.

In the years 1965-66 *Fatah's* action was opposed by Arab states, such as the UAR, Jordan, and Lebanon. The Arab Summit Meetings and the Arab Unified Command condemned subversive action against Israel for fear of retaliation from Israel and its escalation into a full-scale war. Both Jordan and Lebanon intercepted *Fatah* groups attempting to penetrate Israel from their borders, and sometimes even arrested *Fatah* members. *Fatah* was then considered a marginal dissident group and a source of nuisance. Parts of the Arab press even chose to ignore *Fatah's* communiqués.

*Fatah's* hour came after the six-day war. It arrived less because of operational achievements, which had been meagre, than because of the debacle of the regular armies in conventional warfare. The only prospect open and attractive seemed to be *Fedayeen* action.

Many of the guerrilla leaders in our century have written and theorized on their experience, perhaps more than those engaged in any other form of warfare. The plethora of guerrilla treatises stems from the special importance of indoctrination in this warfare. However, the reader of guerrilla literature who is not interested in this indoctrination, may become tired and suspect that guerrilla leaders have had a proclivity to graphomania.

*Fatah*, too, published a good deal. These publications serve as the main source for the present paper. Of particular importance is a series of pamphlets called *Revolutionary Lessons and Trials*, which incorporates *Fatah's* basic ideas. These pamphlets are meant for an Arab public, and for the indoctrination of *Fatah's* own ranks. *Fatah's* broadcasts and announcements quote from these pamphlets. As a basic source they are much more important than *Fatah's* leaders' pronouncements to foreign

journalists, which are conditioned by the needs of the hour, and the impression *Fatah's* spokesmen wish to make on foreigners. The impressions they want to make on Arabs are of much greater significance. Basically, however, it should be acknowledged that there is little difference between what they say for external and what is intended for home consumption. Another important source is issues of *Al-Thama al-Falestiniya*.

There is no certainty that the ideas included in *Fatah's* literature have indeed percolated into its ranks and serve as the motivation for their behaviour. The main significance of these ideas is that they present what the leaders choose to say, and what they would like their ranks to believe.

*Fatah's* publications are not a scientific exposition to be submitted to rigorous theoretical analysis. Their aim is a practical one. Searching for contradictions and inconsistencies has always been a pastime of intellectuals, who are quick in detecting contradictions in the opinions or situations of others, and are sometimes blind to their own. Such discrepancies and inconsistencies are inherent in the human condition. Furthermore, contradictions do not necessarily spell doom, for societies even if they are full of them muddle through, temporize, and generate countervailing forces to rectify trends that have become dangerous.

Analysis of the dissonances within a social group may be motivated by the gratification it gives the analyst. He should be conscious of such a pitfall. However, the significance of the analysis of dissonances lies in the light it may shed on the psychological dimension of the group's position, and its anxieties.

#### *Fatah's Major Conceptions*

*Fatah's* prescription for facing the challenge inherent in the dilemma described above was Revolutionary War waged on guerrilla warfare lines. Its merit is that it does not require such long and tedious preparations as a conventional war, for it can be launched with small forces. Revolutions, *Fatah* reasons, once set in motion, generate their own forces and acquire momentum. 'The armed struggle is the basic factor for expanding the revolution and its continuation'.



Furthermore, such a war is based on the mobilization of the masses whose forces are irresistible, compensating for the weakness of the conventional forces. The Palestinians will play a major role in it, as their dormant might will be activated.

The war *Fatah* aspired to launch was designated indiscriminately by many names: 'War of National Liberation', 'Armed Struggle', 'Armed Revolution', 'The Palestinian Revolution', 'People's Revolutionary War', 'Guerrilla or Partisan War', 'Fedayeen War', 'Fedayeen Action'.

A repeated motto in *Fatah* literature is that the *Fedayeen* action (guerrilla) is *a strategy not tactics*, i.e. the guerrilla as a mode of operation is not instrumental or subservient to the goals of others, but embodies within itself the goals of war. Guerrilla is not only a warfare, but a war. Even if the last blow against Israel were dealt by the regular Arab armies, that would be in *Fatah* parlance, only 'a tactical support in the framework of the Palestinian Strategy'.

The significance of these doctrines will become clearer after an examination of *Fatah's* criticism of the conventional Arab strategy, and the elaboration of *Fatah's* ideas.

#### *Criticism of Conventional Arab Strategy*

*Fatah* was well aware of the weaknesses in the orthodox approach as advocated by Nasser and others: 'The old thinking on liquidation of Zionism in Palestine is based on the principle of quick surprise attack after the Arab armies have reached common agreement, or have been unified, and are in a position to assault the enemy, and to liquidate him in a period of not more than a week. Time was very important in their strategy in order to allow no opportunity for Imperialism to intervene. If the assault succeeded there would be nothing for those who are behind Israel but to resign themselves to a *fait accompli*'.

However, Imperialism succeeded in exploiting the contradictions of the Arab world stemming from its fragmentation after World War I, to forestall any possibility of unity: 'All these contradictions thwarted the reaching of common agreement on preparation to engage the enemy at a given hour and a given place in order to

liquidate him before Imperialism could move to rescue him.'

Even the setting up by the Summit Meetings of inter-Arab bodies for co-ordination of the military effort was criticized by *Fatah* as hindering the advance towards the objective: 'The creation of institutions calling themselves revolutionary, as far as organization is concerned, cannot be our road to the armed revolution. These organizational institutions will entail necessarily freezing stagnation. We reject the logic of stagnation in action or thought.'

The proposition that the Arabs should first set their house in order, as part of the preparation for the war against Israel, is described as suffering from a basic inner contradiction. The Arabs can neither unite themselves nor remedy their internal shortcomings so long as Israel exists. This is a cardinal tenet in *Fatah's* writings. 'The Zionist existence is the cause of all our problems in the Arab region and the cause for the defeat of our expectations of a new dawn for the Arab nation. The hopes and aspirations of the nation and the solution of our problems can, by no means, be achieved unless all efforts are concerted for the sake of liberating Palestine and fully confronting the challenge of the usurping enemy. The Zionist existence is the root of all our diseases and not one of their consequences.' Therefore, the contention that the Arab states must first prepare themselves for war is putting the cart before the horse.

The theory that the existence of Israel is the cause of all Arab troubles is elaborated in detail. The malaise in the Arab countries (restiveness, disunity, lack of national consciousness) is a psychological outcome of Israel's existence: 'The chief direct cause for all these happenings and facts in Arab life is the existence of Zionist occupation and what it entails in arousing complexes, fears and irrational anxiety among Arabs of the anticipated danger of the hated Zionist occupation.'

In order to understand how this theory of Israel's existence as the source of *all* Arab problems became a dogma, one has to consider the role it plays. By it, *Fatah* not only dispenses with the demand for long preparation, but emphasizes to the utmost the *centrality* of the issue of the war against Israel. Furthermore, such an explanation may serve the purpose of generating rage against Israel, as the main



source of national frustrations. All other problems besetting the Arab countries are described as local and derivative, while the problem of the existence of Israel is central, fundamental, and chronic. Hence, precedence must be given to the struggle against Israel over all the other internal or external issues in Arab countries.

*Fatah* explained: 'Those who argue that the timing of initiating our armed revolution should be decided according to the circumstances and Arab difficulties, allege that the Arab Nation is not yet ready for the battle against the enemy. To be explicit, the UAR is experiencing the phase of internal construction and a war in the Yemen. Syria is undergoing a phase of internal integration and military build-up. Iraq is confronting military difficulties with the Kurds in the north. Jordan does not possess the armed capability for withstanding the enemy. Thus we see that every Arab country has its own problems, though by nature they are problems that concern the nation [in general]. However, the active element in them is territorial, as practically every country by itself takes care of its problems. Yet, had we comprehended these problems and analysed them with consciousness, we would have realized that basically they are all tied up with the existence of the Zionist occupation. They are all devised by Imperialism to immobilize the basic national issue so that Palestine will continue to be occupied, and the enemy will plan a new aggression. We must understand that the motive in these difficulties is to ensure the continuation of the Zionist occupation state in Palestine so that the Arab Nation will not be free to liberate Palestine. These difficulties are national and can be resolved basically only by the liquidation of the Zionist occupation state.'

The foreign observer may deduce from these explanations that *Fatah* tries to dramatize the importance of its problem, and that it reflects the usual ethnocentric attitude of people to view their problems to be of general importance, even for others. However, it should be noted that describing the existence of Israel as the main challenge facing Arab Nationalism is not typical of only the Palestinians.<sup>1</sup>

Deferring war until after unity is achieved is criticized by *Fatah* on the score that, so long as Israel exists, there will be no unity, as Israel's existence is the very cause of Arab disunity. This can be learnt from the specific example of

the rift between Egypt and Syria: 'The Zionist wedge in Palestine prevented the interaction of this [Egyptian-Syrian] unity and its development and expansion, and thus there was a setback that caused the miscarriage of this guiding experiment.'

The order should be reversed. The liquidation of Israel should precede Arab unity and actually cause it: 'The motto "Liberation of Palestine is the road to Unity" is the correct revolutionary alternative to the motto "Unity is the road to liberating Palestine"'. For unity cannot be accomplished except by the convergence of the revolutionarily conscious forces in a popular fateful campaign.' The motto 'Liberation of Palestine is the road to Unity' became a central dogma in *Fatah* theorizing.

*Fatah* suggested that all Arab dissensions would be cured by starting the battle. In a memorandum to the Third Summit Meeting it said: 'The rallying of the forces of the Arab fatherland in a single crucible of struggling will be able to melt the dissensions, fuse the contradictions and mobilize the Arab people since the battle will be a fateful, decisive, dreadful and ruinous one. *Fatah* concurs with those who believe that the disputes and divisions in the Arab fatherland may have already reached a level of irresolution, and that the attempt to settle them in the regular fashion of congresses, negotiations and political transactions has resulted, time after time, in a devastating failure. Hence, the chemical operation of very high heat, we mean a liberation war, is the only possibility of uniting the nation and fusing the cleavages and rifts in its set-up.'

In yet another of its publications *Fatah* explained how the war against Israel will act as a catalyst in the development of Arab unity: 'The reason for reversing this motto is that every revolutionary motto, such as that of unity, when it is carried out, ineluctably creates a new situation, differing qualitatively from the previous situations; moreover it negates them. Such a weighty event as this cannot be achieved in the life of nations in a short time unless that nation undergoes a violent shock producing deep traces in the life of its society, its people and its comportment. In order that the motto of unity will materialize there is an inevitable need for introducing an historic change and a fundamental transformation in the shape of Arab society,



in short, causing a revolution in the life of this society. Such historic changes are usually achieved by wars, calamities and uncontrollable economic fluctuations. The nearest means of producing such a convulsion and a great historic change in the course of the national development of the Arab nation is by creating an appropriate environment for a decisive fateful battle between the Arabs and the Zionist enemy.'

Arab politicians usually subordinated the Palestinian issue to their interests and policy, and manipulated it accordingly. *Fatah* signifies an attempt to reverse this trend and subordinate all other Arab problems to the goal of liberating Palestine. Before, the Palestinians orbited round the Arab state; now, *Fatah* tries to stage a Copernican revolution, and reverse the relationship.

Besides the need to achieve absolute success in a short time, the strategy of prolonged preparation for a conventional war has other drawbacks. 'The enemy could take measures to counter a surprise *Blitzkrieg* by a strategy of mobility and decentralization of his forces, so that he can hold his ground for a longer time. Furthermore, he could keep the balance by acquiring weapons and the capability to use them, without being affected by our numerical superiority, so long as the war is a classical war in which only trained regular soldiers possessing the more powerful weapons can be useful.'<sup>2</sup> Thus, in a conventional war, as only the trained regulars can participate, the Arab masses are excluded, and their numerical superiority cannot be used to tilt the scales in their favour.

The strategy of long preparation and even the setting up at the Summit Meetings of military institutions such as an Arab United Command, is described as a defensive strategy: 'Planning on the basis of a defensive strategy leaves initiative to the enemy and thus such a strategy necessarily falls within the Israeli strategy and under its influence.'

The strategy of long preparation assumes that the time factor is favourable to the Arabs. That has been Nasser's contention. *Fatah* challenged this assumption.<sup>3</sup> While Nasser was mostly pessimistic about the Arabs' prospects in 'semi-military operations' and war in the present, he was more optimistic about their long-term prospects. *Fatah* has taken the opposite view.

In an announcement to Arab journalists in 1965 *Fatah* stated that there was great urgency in starting guerrilla warfare against Israel, as Israel would shortly succeed in her project of settling the Negev, her industry and population would then be dispersed, thus making them less vulnerable to *Fedayeen's* attacks. Furthermore, acquiring a nuclear capability would enable Israel to wreak havoc on Arab cities and thus deter the Arabs. 'The present stage is decisive in our history. We must get moving quickly in order to prevent the enemy from carrying out his strategic projects. Otherwise, the *fait accompli* will become an eternal reality.' Results should be achieved before a stage in technological developments is reached in which preponderance in manpower will lose most of its importance.<sup>4</sup>

In guerrilla warfare, there is no need to fear the Sixth Fleet or British parachutists. The West's lessons from Vietnam and elsewhere will inhibit intervention. 'Imperialism will think it over a thousand times before entering on the Zionist side a war which will recall to it the days of aggression in Gaza and Port Said, for Imperialism is well aware of the destiny of all those who oppose a Liberation War'.

A debate has remittently taken place in the Arab press on the effects of the Balance of Terror between the big powers on the freedom of action of small powers, and particularly on the launching of war against Israel. Will the Balance of Terror inhibit Western intervention, or will it, on the contrary, encourage such an intervention because of the Balance of Terror's neutralizing effect on Soviet reaction to a Western intervention? Thus *Fatah* does not rely on the Balance of Terror to dissuade the West from intervening. Guerrilla warfare will do this.

Apart from the military weakness, the strategy of a conventional war had a nefarious psychological influence on the Palestinians 'because the Palestinian individual began to feel that he had no role in the campaign, so long as it was a surprise *Blitzkrieg* which would wipe out Israel in one week. The individual relished the idea of no role in the war, consequently the tumour of his disease became apparent in all his behaviour, in his manners, psychology and thinking. He did not experience the campaign or its preparations, so that members of other Arab



peoples lived it more than we, the Palestinian people, because they recruited, trained and breathed the warm air of activities'.

Last but not least, the objective of liquidating a state precludes conventional warfare as 'classical war may achieve a decisive military victory but it cannot liquidate a society in its entirety'.

*Fatah* tends to describe the weak elements of a conventional war in the context of the Arab-Israel conflict as automatically the stronger elements in guerrilla warfare. Their relationship is that between the concave and the convex. *Fatah* does not take pains to analyse the weaknesses of guerrilla warfare. Guerrilla warfare is endlessly eulogized. In it the main Arab advantages, which are summarized as preponderance in manpower, the vastness of Arab territories, and a long breath which the Arabs have, will come to full fruition. Guerrilla warfare will have other beneficial consequences. It will ensure the 'vitality' and the 'centrality' of the Arab-Israel conflict. It will fire all Arabs' emotions, generate devotion to the Palestinian cause, and will attract support from public opinion in the world at large.

### *The Objective of War*

*Fatah* sets out the objective of the war against Israel in bold type: 'The liberation action is not only the wiping out of an Imperialist base but, what is more important, the extinction of a society [*Inqirad mujtama*]. Therefore armed violence will necessarily assume diverse forms in addition to the liquidation of the armed forces of the Zionist occupying state, namely, it should turn to the destruction of the factors sustaining the Zionist society in all their forms: industrial, agricultural, and financial. The armed violence necessarily should also aim at the destruction of the various military, political, economic, financial and intellectual institutions of the Zionist occupation state, to prevent any possibility of a re-emergence of a new Zionist society. Military defeat is not the sole goal in the Palestinian Liberation War, but it is the blotting out of the Zionist character of the occupied land, be it human or social.' Or: 'The Jewish state is an aberrant mistaken phenomenon in our nation's history and therefore there is no alter-

native but to wipe out the existential trace [*Alathar alwujudi*] of this artificial phenomenon'.

Lt.-Col. Sha'ir, an officer in the command of the PLO Army, also expresses the objective in unmistakable terms: 'The chief objective and the fundamental effort for the Popular War concerning the liberation of Palestine is the reoccupation of the usurped land regardless of the method, be it smashing or annihilation [*Ibada*], because the enemy when he usurped Palestine did not think of the fate of our people, of things holy to it and its lawful rights, in the lands of his forefathers.'

Arab declarations of objectives frequently used extreme expressions like 'throwing the Jews into the sea' which implied genocide. *Fatah* endeavours in its publications to avoid such notorious expressions, stressing that the purpose is limited to the destruction of the state, not of its people. The formula most frequently used in its writings is 'liquidation, or the uprooting of the Zionist existence or entity'. However, when the implications of this objective come to be spelled out, it is realized that Zionism is not only a political regime or a superstructure of sorts, but is embodied in a *society*. Therefore, this *society* has to be liquidated, which underlines that achieving it will require a great deal of killing. The Arabs' objective of destroying the state of Israel (what may be called a 'politicide') drives them to genocide. Since the existence of Israel is founded on the existence of a concentration of Jews so their dispersion should precede the demise of the state. Thus, despite *Fatah's* efforts, it comes back to the Arab objective in its extremist version.

*Fatah* stresses that Jews will be allowed to live in a democratic Arab Palestine after Israel's extinction. In order for the country to become Arab again, the sheer numerical predominance of Jews over Palestinian Arabs requires part of the Jewish population to disappear. How?

*Fatah's* recognition of the right of a Jewish minority to exist is nothing new. It recalls the fundamental Islamic position, which grants the Jews security on the condition of their subordination as a tolerated minority.

The Arab position is enmeshed in this complexity arising from the impossibility of destroying Israel as a state without destroying a considerable part of her inhabitants. To escape from this dilemma the Arab objective is sometimes



expressed in another formula showing perhaps improved articulation without changing the issue: 'the de-Zionization of Israel'. Since the basic meaning of Zionism was the achievement of Jewish statehood, de-Zionizing Israel has only one implication, that Israel will cease being a Jewish state; not Israel but Palestine. Israel and Zionism are organically connected. De-Zionizing Israel is only a contradiction in terms.

*Fatah* senses the difficulties in the Arab position: 'Examining the Palestinian issue from all its aspects, we realize the necessity to satisfy many parties by our solution. For instance, if we consider world public opinion has some weight and influence, we must put out a solution which will satisfy public opinion or be acceptable to it, even be it with difficulty. Of course, when we speak about the need for satisfying world opinion, we do not mean in the kind of solution to the Palestine issue, but in its method. Public opinion has no right to dispute the imperative necessity of its solution [i.e. by destruction of the state], but its right to know the method, so that public opinion will not castigate us with Fascism, anti-Semitism or other inhuman epithets'.<sup>5</sup>

What is more important for the present discussions is the influence of the objective on the nature of the war by which *Fatah* hopes to achieve its aim. Such a war is different from one directed towards a change of the political regime, or towards harassment of the representatives of a remote country until the government prefers to relinquish its rule in that area. In order to achieve the purpose of liquidating a society or wiping out its 'existential trace', war must be of great extent and intensity and become really total.

The question that is crucial to any evaluation of *Fatah's* position is the degree to which guerrilla warfare can suit such an objective. This will be taken up in the concluding chapter of this paper.

### *Palestinian Activism*

*Fatah* exhorted the Palestinians to become the driving force in the conflict, not by agitation in the Arab countries as they had previously, not by pushing the Arab states to action, but by starting actual fighting themselves. *Fedayeen*

action should be developed into a fully-fledged War of National Liberation. Only by what *Fatah* terms an 'armed struggle' can the Palestinians solve their problems and regain Palestine.

*Fatah* stressed its disbelief in the possibility of a political solution. Arab politics are treated, especially before the six-day war, with marked disapproval. Politics are sickening when juxtaposed with the sublimity of the 'armed struggle'. The Palestinians will be able to concentrate on their conflict only if they extricate themselves from inter-Arab rivalries and exercise neutrality. If they take sides in any Arab issue, they will antagonize the opponents of the side they support, who will then try to make things difficult for them. The Palestinian problem should be put above Arab politics. Only by freeing themselves from Arab rivalries will the Palestinians be able to acquire liberty of action in their affairs.

There are inconsistencies in the writings and pronouncements of *Fatah* on how far the Palestinians are capable of accomplishing by themselves the liberation of Palestine. On the one hand, there are announcements that the forces of the Palestinian masses are irresistible and can achieve this goal. On the other hand, there is recognition that the last stroke will have to be dealt by the concerted forces of the Arab armies.

The war *Fatah* aspires to wage is called, in its parlance, the 'Palestinian Revolution', to signify as well the transformation it will cause in the Palestinians themselves who from passive on-lookers will become dynamic fighters.

This trend towards Palestinian activism and the Palestinization of the conflict has to be seen against its historical background. Its psychological aspects should also be tackled, otherwise the human dimension of such developments will evade us. However, in offering psychological explanations, it should always be borne in mind how tentative they are so long as they are based on intuition, and how corrupting they may be by inspiring in the writer, and even the reader, a false sense of clairvoyance.

The mid-1960s saw the re-emergence of the Palestinians as contestants in the Arab-Israel conflict, after about seventeen years in which the confrontation was mainly at states level. The entry of the Arab armies into the war in 1948 transformed the conflict from a civil



one between Jews and Arabs in Palestine, or an intra-state war, to an inter-state war. The activities surrounding the setting up of the Palestine Liberation Organization and the *Fedayeen* organizations signify in some respects an attempt to revert to the previous state of affairs. This development of the Palestinians' reassertion embodied elements of both protest and reproach towards the Arab states for their failure to fulfil their obligation towards the Palestinians. *Fatah*, by emphasizing that the 'Palestinian people is the only true available stock [*Rasid*] for the war of return', insinuates that the others are not so trustworthy.

On the other hand, the Arab states handing over to the Palestinians the leading role in the conflict implied an abdication of sorts by the Arab states and an avowal of their failure. It is not mere coincidence that the Summit Meetings which established the PLO were convened as a result of, presumably, the most dismal of Arab failures between 1948 and the six-day war. All the Arab leaders had committed themselves to preventing Israel from completing her project of pumping water from Lake Tiberias (what Arabs called 'the diversion of the Jordan'). When the time came, they realized their helplessness.

The relationship between the Palestinians and the Arabs has always been ambivalent, each accused the other of being responsible for their inadequacies in the conflict. The Arab states blamed the Palestinians for selling land to the Jews, for their feeble resistance during the Mandate, and for their acting as agents for Israel Intelligence.<sup>7</sup> Their existence epitomized the calamities that befell the Arab world as a result of the Arab-Israel conflict, and the Palestinians were blamed for them.

The Palestinians blamed the Arab states for their half-hearted activities in the conflict, their irresolution, internal bickerings, the restrictions they imposed on the Palestinians, and their manipulation of the conflict to their narrow interests.

Despite that element of protest against the Arab states embodied in the Palestinians' organizations, they could be created only with the help of some Arab official quarters. The PLO did not come into being only by Palestinian spontaneity. It was established from above by the Summit Meetings and derived its author-

ity and part of its finances from them. The *Fatah* acted under the aegis of the Syrian radical Baath. Thus protest and dependence intermingled.

Palestinian activism came in the early 1960s to be cherished widely in Palestinian circles. Palestinian initiative seemed vital after the Arab states' failure. Mr Nashashibi ends his book as follows: 'Oh Palestinians, if you do not restore the land, you will not return to it, and it will not return to you'.

An important factor in the Palestinian move for the 're-Palestinization' of the conflict was the influence of the Algerian War. It was a source of both pride and inspiration. If the Algerians prevailed over a great power such as France, so it was argued, there was hope in defeating small Israel.

Hence the effort to draw analogies between Algeria and Palestine and the effort to describe Israel as only another colonialist case, whose fate is doomed as part of the general historical trend of the liquidation of colonies.

Palestinian ideologists argued that previous presentation of the conflict as an inter-state one was erroneous. It was an Imperialist ruse aimed at excluding the Palestinians from their natural role, thus 'liquidating' the conflict. This argument was, too, an apologia for the Arabs themselves as they too described the conflict as international. They were only deluded and their failing was only naïvety. Both Israel and the Imperialists conspired to blur the 'liberation' aspect of the conflict.

Naming the conflict a 'War of National Liberation' after it had already reached a mature age, and the identification of 'War of National Liberation' with guerrilla warfare, produced among Palestinians an inclination to project it backwards and describe the conflict as if the Palestinians had waged continuous popular guerrilla warfare against the Jews. The history of the events in Palestine from World War I is being rewritten to appear as a continuous popular resistance and heroic uprisings. The blame for failure is focused on the leadership. Naji Alush in his book *Arab Resistance in Palestine 1917-1948* gives a Marxist explanation for this failing. Because of its class interests the Palestinian leadership tied its destiny to colonialism, and betrayed the national cause.

Palestinian radio programmes abound with



plays and descriptions of brave resistance against the Jews in Palestine. Small ambushes or attacks on Jewish settlers are elevated into heroic acts of guerrilla warfare. Thus, heroism anticipated in the future is reinforced by inspiration drawn from the past, and if the real past cannot be a source of such inspiration, some retouching is done. Such an account may have another merit: it implies that the Palestinians are not only imitators of Mao and Che, but preceded them.

The allure of activism is presumably very powerful for the Palestinians. The Palestinians suffered not only from the agony of defeat, deprivation, refugee status, living in camps, but from contempt by the other Arabs. Losing their land and property was a blow to their dignity, as traditionally the criterion for position and prestige in Arab society is ownership of real estate. Activism and 'revolutionarism' are means of gaining self-respect, especially for the younger generation. This generation is ambivalent towards their parents – they reproach them for their weaknesses and failings, calling them 'the generation of defeat', or 'the defeated generation' (*Jil al-Hazima*, *Al-Jil al-Munhar*). Whereas the young generation dubbed itself (already before the six-day war) the 'generation of resistance' or 'the generation of revenge' (*Jil al-Muqawama*, *Jil-al-Naqma*). On the other hand, in order to bolster themselves up as Palestinians, they have to praise the Palestinian record and stress the continuity of the struggle.

Activism has the psychological function of atoning for past failings and inadequacies. It symbolizes the Palestinians' regeneration, and a reaction against fatalism, proverbial in Arab society, about which the young generation feels uneasy. Activism is a manly quality, hailed in a masculine society, and a reaction against emotionalism treated derogatorily in Arab political literature, including *Fatah's*. 'Revolutionarism' (*Thauria*) exerts a strong influence in most of the Arab world signifying a radical change, spectacular and forceful, a protest against the past, and a guarantee of success for the future. The adjective 'revolutionary' is attached to all kinds of nouns in Arab political literature as a word of approbation and optimism.

*Fatah* described what this Palestinian revolution will accomplish: 'The staging of the revolutionary movement is a conscious transcendence

of the circumstances of the Arab Palestinian people, of the traditional leadership, of the stagnated situations, of the opportunism and the self-seeking political arrangements, or those directed from beyond the Palestinian pale, it is a rejection of this fragmented reality. The Palestinian revolutionary movement on this level is a social revolution and a mutation in the social relationship of the Palestinian Arab people.'

#### *Adulation of Violence*

It is not by sheer accident that the third *Fatah* pamphlet entitled *The Revolution and Violence, the Road to Victory* is a selective précis of Frantz Fanon's book *The Wretched of the Earth*. Fanon's influence is manifested in other *Fatah* writings, especially on the psychological impact of Israel on the Arabs and on the transformations that their armed struggle will produce in the Palestinians. 'Violence', 'Violent Struggle' and 'Vengeance' are expressions of great frequency in *Fatah* literature. The reader of these texts is introduced to a world of simmering frustrated hatred and a drive for unquenchable vengeance.

Violence is described as imperative in wiping out colonialism, for between the colonialist and the colonized there is such a contradiction that no coexistence is possible. One of the two has to be liquidated. (Descriptions of the Arab-Israel conflict as both a zero-sum game and a deadly quarrel are frequent in Arab publications.<sup>7</sup>) Such a conflict is 'a war of annihilation of one of the rivals, either wiping out the national entity, or wiping out colonialism.... The colonized will be liberated from violence by violence'. The 'Palestinian Revolution' is such a cataclysmic event that it can only be achieved by violence.

Violence liberates people from their shortcomings and anxieties. It inculcates in them both courage and fearlessness concerning death. Violence has a therapeutic effect, purifying society of its diseases. 'Violence will purify the individuals from venom, it will redeem the colonized from inferiority complex, it will return courage to the countryman.' In a memorandum to Arab journalists, *Fatah* stated: 'Blazing our armed revolution inside the occupied



territory [i.e. Israel, it was written before the six-day war] is a healing medicine for all our people's diseases.'

The praising of violence as purgative, may imply also an element of self-indictment for flaws which will now be rectified, and a desire to exorcize the record of failings. The praising of violence may have as well the function of giving cathartic satisfaction as a substitute for operational action.

Violence, *Fatah* asserts, will have a unifying influence on people, forging one nation from them. It will draw the individuals from the pettiness of their ego, and imbue them with the effusiveness of collective endeavour, as bloodshed will produce a common experience binding them together. Thus, 'the territoriality, [i.e. the fragmentation into different Arab states] which was imposed by Imperialism and Arab leaderships and which was sustained by traditional circumstances in the societies, will end'.

The struggle, besides its political goals, will have as a by-product an important impact on those who participate in it. It is 'a creative struggling' (*Nidalia khallaqa*). Violence, Revolutionism, Activism, 'the battle of vengeance', 'armed struggle', all coalesce in an apocalyptic vision of heroic and just aggression, meting out revenge on Israel.

#### *Engineering a Revolution*

*Fatah* ideologists have been inclined to deal with general ideas of guerrilla warfare, rather than specifying in detail how their objectives will be accomplished through it. Like the other exponents of guerrilla warfare *Fatah* deals with the more practical problems, by means of tracing the phases by which the war or the revolution will evolve. It is called 'revolution' in which warfare proper is only a part of a larger complex of activities, mobilizing the support and the participation in the struggle of the masses, and their own transformation through it.

The Pamphlet entitled *How Will the Armed Popular Revolution Explode?* dwells on the mechanism and process of this 'revolution'. It explains that a revolution originates when the oppressed people become aware of the evils of the present reality, and as a result of the growth of an urge to avenge themselves upon it. Need-

less to say, the reality here is Israel. Though the feelings of revolt against the oppressive reality are spontaneous, they have to be assisted and to be organized. The revolution has to be orchestrated by stages, by its leaders, the 'Revolutionary Vanguard'.

In *Fatah's* descriptions of the stages and their names there are some inconsistencies. They may originate either from different authorship, reflecting diverse influences, or be caused by simple imprecision and vagueness. This vagueness is even more accentuated by the lack of differentiation between the organizational and the operational aspects of the stages, and the relationship between the two.

The parts of *Fatah's* writings which deal with the phases of war make uneasy reading. *Fatah's* terminology and formulation may seem both esoteric and highfalutin. However, what may be more wearisome for the reader who is not versed in such parlance is the generality and abstraction of the discussion. It contains a mixture of a terminology influenced by Marxist literature, attempting to interpret developments in a rational way, with mythical overtones expressed in figures of speech like the 'ignition' or 'detonation' of a revolution, and leaves the reader wondering how it is to be done.

The organizational stages symbolize the expansion of the circles of those involved in the revolution or war. Stage one is the *Formation of the Revolutionary Vanguard*. This is achieved by 'the movement of revolutionary gathering of the revengeful conscious wills'. 'The individual of the Revolutionary Vanguard is distinguished by his revolutionary intuition.' His task is 'to discover the vital tide in his society, for its own sake and for its usefulness for action and movement, and then to realize what obstacles hamper his movement in accordance with history's logic'. Thus, 'the Revolutionary Vanguard signifies the type of human who interacts positively with the reality [of his predicament], and so elevates himself by his consciousness until he releases himself from reality's grip, in order to pursue the superseding of this reality by another, which differs basically in its values and traits. To take a concrete example, the reality of Arab Palestinian people is fragmented, disfigured and corrupted, and shows signs of stagnation. However, despite this stagnation and immobility, the historical direction imposes



the existence of a current of vitality among the Palestinian people, so long as the Palestinian man treasures vengeance on this reality. As this wish for vengeance grows, the current of vitality congeals in the form of a Revolutionary Vanguard.'

The second stage is the *Formation of the Revolutionary Organization*. In it the Revolutionary Vanguard achieves a psychological mobilization of the Palestinian masses by stimulating their urge for revenge, until 'the constructive revolutionary anxiety embraces all the Palestinian Arabs'. It is thus called the stage of *Revolutionary Embracing (Al-Shumul al-Thauri)*. Indoctrination of the masses will not precede the staging of the armed struggle but will be achieved by it. 'Mistaken are those who advocate the need for rousing a national consciousness before the armed struggle assumes a concrete form. . . . Ineluctably the armed struggle and mass consciousness will go side by side, because the armed struggle will make the masses feel their active personality and restore their self-confidence.' The Vanguard will galvanize the masses by means of its example and sacrifice in guerrilla activities.

*Fatah's* publications state that irresistible might is stored in the Arab masses. They are 'latent volcanoes', they are the main 'instrument' of the struggle. This explosive capacity has to be activated and this task is allotted to the Vanguard.

The revolution's success is dependent on co-operation between the Vanguard and the masses. 'The Revolution in its composition has a leadership and a basis, necessitates the accomplishment of a conscious interaction between the basis, which is the masses, and the leadership, in order to ensure the revolution's success and continuation'.

The third stage is the *Formation of the Supporting Arab Front*. Popular support for the 'Palestinian Revolution' is to be secured in all Arab countries in order to safeguard rear bases in Arab countries for the war, and as a means of putting pressure on the Arab governments not to slacken or deviate from aiding the Palestinian Revolution by pursuit of their local interests. The Supporting Arab Front is thus expressed on two levels, the popular and the governmental. The popular support is used as an instrument of pressure against the Arab governments.

In the same publications the overall development of the revolution is divided into two major stages: one, *Organization and Mobilization*, called elsewhere the *Phases of Revolutionary Maturing*, comprises the organizational stages already enumerated. The second stage is called that of the *Revolutionary Explosion (Marhalatal-Tafjir al-Thauri)*. The stage of the Revolutionary Explosion is described in colourful language: 'The hating revengeful masses plunge into the road of revolution in a pressing and vehement fashion as pouring forces that burn everything that stands in their way.' In this stage 'tempests of revenge' will be let loose. However, the Vanguard should ensure mass discipline to prevent violence going berserk. 'The Revolution's Will should obey its regulating brain.'

While the first stage is preparatory, the second is the main interesting stage. Unfortunately, *Fatah's* description of it is rather rudimentary. Even the question of the timing of its beginning is not clear. *Fatah* specified: 'Our operations in the occupied territory can never reach the stage of the aspired revolution unless all Palestinian groups are polarized around the revolution.' *Fatah* does have an ambition to become the central leader of all the Palestinians, proving that the other movements, which have not matured round what has been described as a Revolutionary Vanguard like itself, are artificial and 'counterfeited'. Thus the stage of revolution will arrive only when *Fatah* has mobilized all the Palestinians.

Nevertheless, *Fatah's* small action at the beginning of January 1965 is frequently hailed as the 'detonation of the revolution', implying that the revolution started then. By the same token, at the beginning of 1968, *Fatah's* official journal celebrated the fourth anniversary 'of our Palestinian people's revolution in the occupied territory'. Perhaps this ambiguity as to the timing of the revolutionary stage stems from *Fatah's* emphasis of the need to precipitate action. Once action is launched the development proceeds spontaneously.

#### *Influences*

The theories of guerrilla warfare have been developed in the twentieth century several times over. They have been popularized and roman-



ticized to the extent of becoming almost part of this generation's culture. No wonder that *Fatah* repeats ideas expounded elsewhere. It would be excessive to expect its approach to be completely original, nor does it pretend to be all original. Actually, the temptation to pose as original is less than the confidence *Fatah* can draw from the success of these theories in China, Algeria, Cuba or Vietnam. These successes are presented as precedents guaranteeing *Fatah's* success as well. The feeling of kinship of sorts in a family of successful revolutionaries and guerrilla fighters inspires both optimism and pride. Thus, *Fatah* makes no bones about its indebtedness to the exponents of guerrilla warfare. Its spokesmen are fond of explaining that, although they have learnt from others, they rely only on their own specific experience. No doubt the singularity of the Palestinian case limits the possibility of benefiting from lessons from elsewhere.

The main guerrilla treatises of Mao Tse-tung, Giap, Che Guevara and Régis Debray, have been translated into Arabic in several editions, and serialized in the press. In its main series of 'Revolutionary Lessons and Trials', *Fatah* published pamphlets bearing the titles *The Chinese Experience*, *The Vietnamese Experience*, and *The Cuban Experience*.

In their books on guerrilla warfare, General Talas and Colonel Sha'ir too give long and detailed accounts of the doctrines of guerrilla warfare as developed by its major exponents.

Though Algeria, as an Arab case, should have served as the main source of inspiration, it seems that the greatest influence was exerted by Cuba. (Algeria has not codified her guerrilla experience in the same way as the other guerrilla practitioners. At least such a publication, if it does exist, has not come to the general notice. Perhaps the reason is that Boumedienne was more of a commander of the regular forces outside Algeria in Tunisia than a guerrilla leader.<sup>8</sup>)

The reasons for *Fatah's* seeing Cuba as the main source of inspiration seem obvious: Mao has stressed that guerrilla warfare can succeed only in a large country like China where the guerrillas can establish a base out of the reach of enemy forces. Mao has specified that guerrilla warfare cannot succeed in a country the size of Belgium. Mao's words thus disprove *Fatah*,

whereas Cuba is a success story of guerrilla warfare in a small country.

Che Guevara radiates optimism. He light-heartedly urged taking the plunge before conditions matured, while Mao is both more cautious and sombre. The first sentence of the *Fatah* pamphlet on Cuba reads: 'The Cuban experience has proved the error of those who see a need for waiting until the maturing of the objective and the subjective circumstances for the revolution, instead of the continuous effort to accelerate the formation of these circumstances.'

In China and Vietnam the bearers of the revolution were the Communist Party. *Fatah* disapproves of the need to set out as a party. In Cuba it all started from the wanderings of the first twelve people in the Sierra Maestra. Thus the Cuban model suits *Fatah* better, precisely because it was not a popular movement.<sup>9</sup>

General Talas, who dedicated his book to Guevara, and praises him to the skies as the 'guide of War of National Liberation', explains in the introduction that his main contribution was the idea of the 'revolutionary focus', the nucleus of the revolt which, though numerically small, can start the movement off and win.

Representatives of *Fatah* and the other organizations established relations with China, Vietnam and Cuba, and were given help and advice. Some of *Fatah's* leaders were sent to Algeria and China for training.

#### 4. Debate and Action

During the years 1963 to 1967 there was a spate of articles in the Arab press on the different aspects of Arab strategy against Israel. A wide range of problems was discussed, such as the kind of war the Arabs should wage, how it should be initiated, analyses of strategic strengths and weaknesses of the two sides, the impact of nuclear weapons – should Israel acquire them, problems arising from Western intervention, the influence of Egyptian missiles, the timing of war, the possibilities of a preventive war by Israel, and the whole field of guerrilla warfare.

To the strategic analyst part of this material may seem amateur – an exercise in imitation of



the style of strategic discussions in the West. However, these publications are interesting, as they throw light on the mood and thinking of some important Arab circles. It would be tedious to try fully to report on the views expressed. My purpose is to isolate some of the strands of thought on guerrilla warfare, and Arab strategy in general, not in a micro-historic way – tracing chronologically the details of the debate in Arab countries, identifying the people who took part in it, and the circles they represented – but rather in a conceptual way, reconstructing the possible different positions on the problem of the Arab programme of action against Israel.

#### *Fedayeen not the Solution*

The basic suitability of guerrilla warfare as advocated by *Fatah* was questioned. Naji Alush writing his book in 1963–64 directed his criticism against articles published in 1962 in *Our Palestine*, the journal in which *Fatah* made its ideological debut. Alush asked 'Why should we suppose that the Israeli Army will stand with its hands tied in the face of *Fedayeen's* attacks? The Israeli Army will destroy Arab villages and cities, and even may take a decisive step, and, for example, occupy the whole West Bank. . . .

'The Journal considered that in the present circumstances the Arab armies are incapable of wiping out Israel, whereas it sees that the Palestinian entity is capable of accomplishing this miracle. How will it be? With the help of the Arab states and the non-Arab states?

'Naturally we see the Revolutionary Road, which *Our Palestine* has chosen, as an unwarranted one, because it is built on improvisation, excitement and spontaneity. It will restore the issue to 1947 [i.e. to another defeat]. . . .

'Smashing Israel cannot be done by *Fedayeen's* attacks because of the completeness of her preparations and arms.'

The relevance of the Algerian case to the Palestinian condition came under criticism from several quarters. Naji Alush admonished, 'The legend of the liberation of Algeria may push the liberation of Palestine into an abyss. The heroic triumph of the Algerian revolt made some Palestinians and some progressive Arabs fancy that

following the same road will bring the same result'.

Alush spelled out the differences between Algeria and Palestine, invoking the authority of an analysis by Professor Walid Al-Khalidi:

1. *The Combat Area*. Algeria was a colony with a small French minority and ten million Algerians. Palestine is divided into three: a small Arab minority in Israel concentrated in a few zones, and limited in its possibilities of action; the West Bank has become a Jordanian colony occupied by the 'Forces of the Desert and mercenaries', where the Palestinians are prohibited from organizing themselves; the Gaza Strip is administered as occupied territory by an Arab government, withholding from its inhabitants self-government which might have transformed them into a nucleus from which serious action for the liberation of Palestine could have been developed. The Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank have first to overcome Arab government domination, before they can organize themselves for war.

2. *The Nature of the Battle*. In Algeria it was a battle for independence . . . which is not the case in Palestine. There it is a battle for the uprooting of a state recognized by the United Nations, supported by world public opinion and the principal capitalist states. . . . Britain and the United States were ready to accept the independence of Algeria, but they are not ready to accept the liquidation of the Zionists' state. The Algerian struggle for independence could be compared to the Palestinians' struggle before 1948 . . . after 1948 the nature of the situation changed in Palestine.

3. Algerians could have bases in Tunisia and Morocco. However, no Arab government will tolerate the organization of the Palestinians on its territory, unless they constitute a part of its forces and are subservient to its policy.

4. *The Problem of Power*. The Algerian people could paralyse, by employing guerrilla warfare, a large French army, owing to the vastness of Algeria which is 852,600 square miles, in which there were many mountains, thick bushes and roadless regions, which rendered movement of the army difficult and made way for successful guerrilla warfare. As regards Palestine, most of the occupied territory is a plain, settled with fortified settlements, connected by an extensive network of roads, which facilitates army movements and renders the task of *Fedayeen* difficult.

5. When the revolution erupted in Algeria, its active organizations were in Algeria. As regards the



Palestinians, the organization of a revolution must grow outside of the occupied territory. . . . Since the revolutionary organizations are outside the boundaries of the Zionists' state, any action by them necessitates an armed invasion against which the usurping state will launch a military operation directed against the Arab neighbouring countries.

6. In Algeria, the fighters were men attached to their people who left the towns and their sham for the bosom of the masses. The propagandists of revolution in Palestine are chatterboxes of the bourgeoisie who prefer coffee houses in Beirut, Damascus, or Gaza to the sands of the occupied territory and the mountains of what was left in Palestine west of the Jordan. They organize themselves in Gaza, Lebanon, and Kuwait issuing thousands of proclamations without remembering once where the battlefield is, or discovering its boundaries and purpose.

7. Arab states' aid to Algeria was very small, yet, despite its smallness, Algeria achieved victory because her conditions made that meagre aid sufficient. However, in the battle for Palestine, the aid will not be adequate even if it is large. This is because the aim is to uproot the usurping state and not to spread fear and ruin inside its borders. The Palestinian people, divided and oppressed, cannot mobilize the necessary power to squash the Zionists' state which is defended by 300,000 well-trained and well-armed soldiers.

8. The Algerian campaign took a territorial shape [i.e. pertaining to one Arab people or state] . . . the struggle stopped at the traditional borders of Algeria, and it recognized the borders drawn by colonialism. This nature of territoriality made the Palestinians demand a territorial struggle [i.e. by the 'Palestinian entity' as distinct from the rest of the Arabs], but that is impossible in Palestine. Algeria could be liberated without a clash with Tunisia or Morocco and their reactionary governments, while the revolutionary operation for the liberation of Palestine must collide with the Government of Jordan.'

No doubt this is sound criticism. It spares the need for a military evaluation of guerrilla prospects in the area, which, coming from an Israeli, might be suspected as partisan.

### *Jordan*

Jordan had an important role in any Arab plan for an offensive against Israel. Jordan had the longest border with Israel and the easiest access to her vital centres. Only from Jordan (West Bank) could a thrust to cut Israel at her narrow waist

take place. However, nationalist radical circles like the Qaumiun al-Arab, and the Baath argued that Jordan could not be relied upon because of her regime, and that because she had benefitted from the demise of Arab Palestine, she was basically opposed to the revival of Arab Palestine. They loathed Jordan as being a creation of colonialism, epitomizing its inheritance. They considered King Abdullah as the main culprit for the Arab disaster in 1948, accusing him of putting up sham fighting, as his real aim in the war had been not to fight the Jews, but to carve out a province for his desert kingdom. Jordan by her existence continued the betrayal of her founder. Furthermore, Jordan was a weak sector in the Arab front, amenable to Western pressure as her very existence was dependent on Western support. This dependence constricted her participation in any serious action against Israel, 'the step-daughter' (*Rabiba*) of Imperialism. They concluded, in the fashion now popular among circles of the Arab left, that between Jordan and Arab Nationalism there was a contradiction that could only be resolved by a revolution in Jordan. Thus, the struggle to subvert the Jordanian regime should be given precedence over the struggle against Israel: 'The road to Tel-Aviv leads through Amman' as it was put succinctly, or as translated into a slogan: 'The liquidation of the Reactionaries is the first step towards the liberation of Palestine'.

Against this theory the official circles expounded a Jordanian ideology, vindicating Jordan's special mission in the framework of Arab Nationalism in general, and in particular, *vis-à-vis* Israel.<sup>1</sup> Jordan was described as an inheritor of Arab Palestine, the main bulwark against Israel, and the basis from which the offensive against Israel would develop, spear-headed by the Jordanians.

The Jordanians proudly pointed out that in Jordan all Palestinians were granted Jordanian citizenship, which was not the case in the other Arab countries. Thus, the Jordanians and the Palestinians all merged into one people. They argued that this step signified the direction for the future, for a merger was in the spirit of Arab nationalism whose purpose was to reduce the number of Arab entities as a step towards their unification. In short, the patriotic Jordanians hoped for the swallowing up of liberated Palestine in Jordan, while the Radicals dreamt about the



swallowing up of Jordan by the liberated Palestine.

For the Syrian Baath the wish to subvert the Jordanian regime was not only a consideration of national ideology, but was motivated by a long antipathy towards the Hashemites, and by hatred towards a competing neighbour.

President Nasser himself held similar views and occasionally expressed them. It was part of his general motto launched after the break-up of the merger with Syria that 'the unity of Purpose should precede the Unity of Ranks'. He argued that the Arabs could not achieve unity or even co-ordinate action, unless they adhered to the same political philosophy (i.e. Unity of Purpose). Otherwise, even in issues on which there was an understanding in principle, the basic patched-up divergences would eventually cripple common action. Thus, the regimes in the Arab states had to be homogenized, which, of course, for him meant the adoption by the other Arab states of the Egyptian way of life. Though when Nasser announced this principle, it was intended against Syria, it became a slogan against the so-called 'Reactionary Regimes'. In the name of nationalism the UAR began agitating against Arab regimes calling on their people to overthrow their rulers.

Nasser many times harped on the need to liquidate the 'Reactionaries' before the attack on Israel: 'We cannot liberate ourselves from Imperialism and Zionism before we get rid of reaction and exploitation' (2 January 1962); 'We shall restore Palestine after organizing our internal front and after we get rid of the Reactionary partners of Zionism and Imperialism' (23 December 1962); 'How can we enter Palestine leaving behind us the Reactionary Fifth Column. . . . I expect the Arab people to liberate themselves and purify themselves from the fifth column: only then will the hour of Palestine come' (Port Said, 23 December 1961).

The 'Reactionaries' were not unarmed in the face of the radical onslaught and could put forward a barrage of persuasive arguments too: the results of intervention of each Arab state in the affairs of the others would harm them all and increase disunity. Arab nationalism needed the pacification of inter-Arab quarrels and the narrowing of their discords, not their exacerbation. As only the enemies of the Arabs, including Israel, would benefit from Arab quarrels, the

Radicals would become unwittingly their allies. Unity of Purpose was only a guise for Egyptian ambitions for hegemony. The much acclaimed internal revolution implied an imposition on the Arabs of foreign ideologies, such as socialism, which were inimical to Islam. Instead of bickering among themselves the Arabs should concentrate their efforts against Israel. The postponement of the struggle against Israel by internal strife was only a betrayal of the national cause.

The difficulty of achieving a consensus on policy in a coalition of sovereign states is not specifically Arab. It is a general pattern, as the experiences of NATO can witness. What is peculiar to the Arab case is that, as the Arabs consider themselves one nation, there arises a great expectancy of achieving unity, and when this hope is disappointed, their internal relations deteriorate grossly and even greater disunity results.

Inter-Arab relations have been bedevilled by a basic antinomy: when Arab states as a group come closer together, dissensions erupt between them, they quarrel and part acrimoniously. Eventually, reasons of ideology and of political benefits accruing from the establishment of a common front, dictate a need for *entente*, but no sooner is this reached than they again start quarrelling. Proximity begets quarrels, distance induces *rapprochement*. The whole history of the Arab League, and inter-Arab relationships can be represented by these cyclical fluctuations.

Thus, at the end of 1963 the time for a *rapprochement* arrived. In order to ward off Syrian pressure to take action against Israel's 'diversion of the Jordan' Nasser called for a Summit Meeting. Paradoxically, in doing so he complied with the exhortations of the Reactionaries, to put aside fraternal discords and collaborate. Syria, too, was interested in such a meeting as it implied some recognition by the UAR of her regime, which until then the UAR had ostracized. To mark the occasion Nasser coined a new slogan, 'Unity of Action', to convey achieving an agreement on practical matters, though of a limited scope. In Arab politics it used to be called 'Solidarity', which is a functional, narrow collaboration as a substitute for 'Unity', or an escape from it. A pact of solidarity was signed in the Third Summit Meeting to signify the refraining from agitation of one state against the other. Thus, the objective of homogenizing Arab regimes was



dropped. Revolution was not for export. Each state would determine its internal regime.

The Radicals, though recognizing the exigencies that made Nasser follow such a policy, considered his collaboration with the Reactionaries an outrageous betrayal of the national cause. They scathingly criticized Nasser for his oscillations between his previous 'revolutionary' stand of 'Unity of Purpose' and his more pragmatic and conservative stand of 'Unity of Action'.<sup>2</sup> Their reasoning had a formidable logic. Patched-up solidarity would restrict action to marginal issues. In major issues, such as achieving Arab unity, and the war against Israel, which impinged on the basic interests of the Arab states and the future structure of the Arab world, such a consensus would be unpracticable. Thus, solidarity would be detrimental to the pursuit of the major goals.

The dilemma which presented itself was that, although unity strengthens, meeting for the purpose of producing unity disrupts. 'Unity of Purpose' is needed for the pursuit of the bold projects of Arab Nationalism; the effort to reach a 'Unity of Purpose' produces disunity, which diminishes Arab power. 'Unity of Action' is more practical, but it restricts action to the very narrow confines of agreed policies.

The Radicals believed that the Arab masses were feverishly urging a revolution, and that 'Unity of Purpose' could be achieved. They were blind to one basic factor: the differences between the Arab states that hinder concord do not only stem from ideological heterogeneity, but are expressions of local interests of the separate Arab states as states.

All these discussions and considerations had, of course, wider implications than the problem of the Arab strategy in the conflict, yet they impinged directly on it. Furthermore, in all the arguments the consideration of which way better served the Arab cause in Palestine was given primary importance. The Reactionaries argued that solidarity was commendable, as it enabled a concentration of efforts against Israel. President Nasser frequently used the argument that the Arabs should achieve unity because it was the road leading to the redemption of Palestine, and he even justified his intervention in the Yemen on the grounds that it was a necessary step in the same direction.<sup>3</sup>

Paradoxical as it may seem, *Fatah's* doctrine of putting the Palestine problem above the other

issues, and its principle of non-intervention or neutrality in Arab rivalries implied, formally at least, support for the *status quo* and the argumentation of the Reactionaries.

On this score, *Fatah* came under attack from the other Radicals for lack of genuine 'revolutionariness'. Alush specified: 'Non-intervention in the Arab controversies is a negative attitude which serves the reaction that betrayed Palestine. In 1948 the controversies were personal and concerned interest; today they are ideological, the struggle between the reaction that betrayed Palestine and the progressiveness that endeavours to redeem it. . . . We know perfectly that the Arab Masses' march towards Unity and Socialism is the march for the Liberation of Palestine. . . . Therefore, irrespective of the shortcomings of this mass movement, we should not, by any means, assume a neutral position towards it. Our forsaking it is forsaking the Palestinian issue and a victory to our enemies.'

The Radicals maintained that the liberation of Palestine was part of the Arab revolution, and the consideration of staging this revolution should have the highest priority. They argued that *Fatah's* emphasizing the 'Palestinian entity' as a base for Palestinian activism was a sign of defeatism and despair of the common Arab effort to liberate Palestine. It signified isolationism, Palestinian parochialism, and anti-Pan-Arabism. Alush: 'The demand for setting up the Palestinian entity and for non-intervention in the affairs of the other Arab states has an important meaning that should be made clear. It signifies the strengthening of the territorial local versions of nationalism. . . . We cannot call for one entity and fight against other entities. The Palestinian who demands a state in his own name, cannot demand that the Lebanese will be assimilated in Arabdom, or that the Egyptian will divest himself of his Egyptian nationalism.'

Such an issue may seem to the foreigner a mere scholastic triviality, yet the pains *Fatah* took to reply indicate its importance. *Fatah* belaboured the idea that at the present stage efforts should be on the local territorial level (i.e. by the different peoples, Egyptian, Iraqi, Algerian, as opposed to the national level which embraces all Arabs): 'It is our belief that the great Arab revolution can be effected only in phases and on a territorial level. The liberation of any Arab country cannot start before this country itself moves with all its revolu-



tionary force, the outcome of the growth of revolutionary factors in it. The revolutionary interaction in a given country cannot be accomplished outside this country, but must take place in its special framework.'

Furthermore, the self-help of one country is the factor mobilizing the collective effort of the Arab Nation: 'The Arab Nation would not have supported struggling Algeria with all its might, unless the Algerian Revolutionary Vanguards had first moved\*and taken off. This elevated the Algerian issue to the level required for liberation'.

### *The Position of Syria*

The Syrian Baath position in the conflict has always been radical and bellicose. The Eighth Congress of the Syrian Baath Party (May 1965) pronounced, 'The continuation of Israel implies that not one of the Arab Nation's goals can be really completely realized'. It demanded that 'the point of departure of the Arab political strategy should be a basic rejection of Israel's existence, as between it and Arab existence there is a contradiction'.

Syria took a radical stand in the Summit Meetings. She criticized Arab concentration on the diversion of the tributaries of the Jordan as being itself a diversion from the main task of liberating Palestine. (It is a pun in Arabic: *Tahwil* and *Tahrir*.) She demanded that Arab troops be allowed to move from one state to another, which Lebanon and Jordan opposed as a menace to their independence. The Syrians demanded that the Palestinians, including those in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, should be organized and armed, in order to be the spearhead in the coming war with Israel.

The Baath extremist faction that got itself into power in the coup of February 1966 went farther. The Syrian Baath Ninth Congress (October 1966) accentuated the centrality of the Palestinian issue: 'The Palestinian issue is the basic axis in the strategy of the party in the various domains, internal [i.e. Syrian], Arab and international.'

The theme of the power of the masses was given great prominence: 'The centre of gravity and superiority of the Arab nation on Imperialism, Reaction and Zionism collectively resides in the tremendous [*Ha'il*] capabilities in our rebelling Arab masses, which are inexhaustible'.

The principle of the irresistible power of the masses became for the Baath leadership a criterion for interpretation of history. The Arab defeat in 1948 was attributed to the leaders' prevention of the masses from participating in that war, or the 'detaching of the Arab masses from exercising their right in liberating their land'.

In the Extraordinary Congress of 1 April 1966, the Party adopted the People's Liberation War as a central doctrine in its ideology. The whole Arab nation would participate in this war, and it would be aimed simultaneously at the liberation of Palestine and the liberation and unification of the Arab world. This would constitute the principle of the 'Unity of the Masses' struggle'.

On 15 May 1966, the Party leadership stated in a proclamation: 'The Palestinian Liberation issue is not separated from the issue of the struggle for Unity and Socialism, but is the first driving force for the Arab Revolution.... The battle for liberating Palestine is not solely a battle against the Zionist occupation, but it is a general war and a total revolution against all the powers of Imperialism and against the manifestations of backwardness and fragmentation.... The battle of liberating Palestine is in this sense the battle of the Palestinian Arab people and the Arab masses and not a war of governments... which necessitates that the masses understand the nature of the battle and take the initiative in controlling it'.

The slogan of the 'People's Liberation War' served an important function for the new rulers. By it they vindicated their main difference from the leaders they overthrew, helping to lend an ideological guise to an internal power struggle within the party. Syria, they claimed, would be the Hanoi of the war against Israel.

Syrian spokesmen overcharged the mission the People's Liberation War had to accomplish simultaneously: destroy Israel, defeat the Imperialists, overthrow the reactionary regimes, unify all Arab countries and institute Socialism. Being such a cure-all, one can doubt its suitability to any one of these tasks.

In some of their proclamations, immediately after mentioning the motto of People's Liberation War, a proviso was added that its nature had to be studied and its plans should be worked out.<sup>4</sup> However, a conclusion as to its potency did not wait for such studies. It seems that the Syrians were so enchanted with the slogan that they did not ask themselves the concrete question, how



can such a war, in which the masses and not the government take the initiative for control, be carried out? who organizes it? or consider the reaction of the regular army to the expropriation of its role as the main instrument in war.

The Syrians demanded that the Arabs launch a war against Israel without delay. Yet their bellicosity stood in no relation to their state of military preparedness, which was low. They used to appeal for help from the UAR at the smallest incident on the borders. President Nasser ridiculed them for that, stressing that defensive capability should precede offensive.

The Baath manipulated symbols and slogans of People's Liberation War for the purpose of legitimization of its rule, and as a weapon in the external and internal political struggle. Externally, it served the Baath as a means in the competition with the Arab states, and especially with Nasser, to outdo each other in the championing of Arab Nationalism. Internally, it served the purpose of galvanizing an atmosphere of emergency, a continuous revolution, and a permanent purge of their rivals and their own ranks. Notwithstanding the conscious demagoguery and rhetoric in the Baath's slogans of People's Liberation War and their incitement to war, the leaders may have been convinced of their truth and necessity.

The only translation of the People's Liberation War into practice was the setting up of a militia, the training of workers and youth to use weapons, and the special relationship with *Fatah*. *Fatah* served the Syrians as a cover for the continual harassment of Israel. The Syrians could preserve ideological consistency through activities which they commended, and at the same time claimed were not theirs but *Fatah's*.

There was, too, a strain of divergence between the Syrians and *Fatah*. *Fatah* demanded of its members neutrality in inter-Arab rivalries, whereas Syria championed full commitment to the revolutionaries' ideas of first defeating the Reactionaries, i.e. subservience to Syrian policies. These divergences might erupt into quarrels.

#### *The Arguments of Timing and Embroilment*

*Fatah's* pretensions regarding the enormous potentialities of *Fedayeen* activities raised the question of why their own incubation period had

lasted so long. Why had they waited almost eleven years before they started operating? Instead of explaining how small were their origins, they chose to retort in the following manner: 'In the throng of events, we were apprehensive of occupying our nation in two great revolutions, therefore we bode our time until our nation gave birth to one offspring, as heroic Algeria liberated herself from French Colonialism. During this time we concentrated our forces and prepared for the day of the take-off.'

*Fatah* had to answer a yet more serious criticism. Over the years the main argument against *Fatah* was that its activities might cause an escalation and war, thus embroiling the Arabs in a war before their preparations were completed. President Nasser repeatedly used this argument. He, and other Arab leaders, used to argue that the time and place of the war should be decided by the Arabs, whereas *Fatah's* actions might pass the initiative to Israel.

*Fatah's* retort to this criticism, called by it 'the argument of embroilment' [*Taurit*], revolved round the idea that without *Fedayeen's* actions the Arabs would never achieve preparedness: 'The mere feeling of external danger is not sufficient to bring the Arab Nations to a state of alertness and preparedness. Inevitably this danger – which has already been felt for tens of years – must be incarnated in action, in order consciously to push the Arabs towards preparations from inside. That cannot be accomplished unless the Arab masses see, and sense, this danger in concrete form before their eyes, as a result of the armed operations which the Palestinian Revolutionary Vanguard will launch in our occupied land. These operations will put an end to the rivalries rampant among the national groups and render the internal front national and cohesive.'

#### *Achievements*

The *Fedayeen* activities leading to the six-day war were described in detail elsewhere, in the many books published on this war, so a short summary may suffice.

*Fedayeen's* operational achievements in the thirty months from its debut to the six-day war are not impressive by any standard. Of course, it is not difficult to slip by night over the border and lay a demolition set or a mine on the edge of a



Jewish village or road. Their *modus operandi* was mainly that.

In these two and a half years, 14 Israelis (4 civilians, 4 policemen and 6 soldiers) were killed as a result of *Fedayeen* activities, and 72 were wounded (27 civilians, 6 policemen and 39 soldiers). There were 122 cases of sabotage and mining, of which 45 were detected and foiled.\*

The level of performance of operation was rather low. Though *Fatah* trained students in Europe and Algeria, they mostly dispersed so that *Fatah* had to recruit operators from prisons and persons from the fringes of the Palestinian refugee society. In many cases their motivation was mercenary. That facilitated the penetration of *Fatah* by the Jordanian and Lebanese services when they were interested in combatting it. The organization was an inverted pyramid, more leaders than operators, and functions were not defined clearly, which resulted in disorder. The contact between the leaders and the operators was not systematic but rather on an *ad hoc* basis for the purpose of a certain operation. Many leaders and ideologists preferred to be engaged in discussion on hair-splitting ideological controversies, than to operate themselves. (Alush's description already quoted presumably was not off the mark.) There was a wide gap between the leaders and the ranks which affected their communication. As *Fatah's* groups failed, the Syrian GHQ stepped in, in July 1966, and actually took over the control of the organization, in planning and even in providing operators.

To hide its mediocre results *Fatah* inflated communiqués which bore no resemblance to what actually took place. Often, reported actions did not take place at all, and the Israeli authorities even had difficulty in identifying them. The low quality of the operators contributed to distortion and falsehood as well. It is quite possible that the *Fatah* command itself was sometimes a victim of false reports. However, it seems that the leaders had no interest in discovering the truth, as that would have deflated their claims. If they did not actually ask for distortions, they at least tolerated them. Furthermore, the exaggerations in their own communiqués might have set an example for the ranks to emulate.

These activities did not endanger Israel's national life, but nobody likes to be beaten, or

stung, even if it is not fatal. Furthermore, *Fatah's* actions were a challenge to the primary obligation of Israel as a state to defend her citizens. Israel has always been apprehensive that not retorting in kind to Arab incursions might encourage them further. Besides the more passive methods of ambushes and interception, Israel resorted to retaliatory action, nearly six months after *Fatah* had started its actions. The main purpose of these retaliatory actions was to bring pressure on the Jordanian authorities to take action against *Fatah* and not allow it to use Jordanian territory for bases of departure. Actually, the measures taken by the Jordanians against *Fatah's* marauding were motivated by these retaliatory actions and their threat.

Israel was caught on the horns of a dilemma, as her retaliatory action aimed at *Fatah* served to build up *Fatah* in the eyes of the Arabs. Before launching a retaliatory action and in order to justify it, Israel used to take stock of *Fedayeen's* activities and publish lists, thereby confirming their importance. There could not be a higher commendation of *Fatah* for Arab public opinion.

There are many ironies in conflicts. The adversaries, besides fighting and hurting each other, unwittingly benefit each other. Throughout the conflict Israel's gains were due, to a considerable extent, to Arab rejection of a compromise. Had the Arabs not discarded the Partition Resolution and started the 1948 war, Israel's present boundaries would have been those of the November 1947 Resolution. There are many other examples of Arab intransigence benefiting Israel. At the same time, Israel could not help assisting *Fatah* to acquire prestige.

*Fatah's* leaders used to boast that in contrast to the inactivity and lack of success of the Arab states, they had devised the right method of combat against Israel. They presented Israeli retaliatory actions as a reaction of panic, which only proved the effectiveness of their own operations.

In a 'Political Statement' of 10 December 1966, *Fatah* described its achievements so far in the following manner: 'The transference of the Palestinian issue in international circles from issues of refugees, boundaries, aid, compensation and settlement, to an issue of liberation and self-determination.... The action of the *Fedayeen* succeeded in setting the Palestinian issue in motion, in its liberating lines and succeeded in polarizing the masses to gather round it.

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\* Israel Defence Forces Spokesman's data.



'Creating an atmosphere of instability among the Jewish immigrants and the new generation, so that they learn that the land does not belong to them. . . . Giving impetus to emigration from our land, and stopping immigration to it. Paralyzing the economic growth of Israel which requires stability and tranquillity. The permanent commitment of enemy troops on the borders and what it entails in terms of a budgetary burden and halting of projects. Stopping foreign capital investments in the occupied territory.'

With regard to the Palestinian people, *Fatah* argued that its action accomplished the 'liquidation of the negativist aspects in its psyche. . . . Deepening the confidence of our people in the *Fedayeen* action'.

These pretensions are exaggerated. *Fedayeen* action did not hamper the economic growth of Israel. If immigration has declined in recent years the reason is to be found within the Jewish communities. Nor has *Fatah* affected detrimentally Israel's forces or defence projects. Nor can it be said that *Fedayeen* action has 'liquidated negativism among the Palestinians'.

*Fedayeen* activities were much more important politically than operationally. They aggravated very considerably the tensions between the Arab states and Israel, and highlighted the conflict in the international arena. They caused a *radicalization of the Arab position in the conflict*.

The special typology of the Arab-Israel conflict, as a confrontation between one state and a multiplicity of states, has influenced its functioning. The plurality on the Arab side has paradoxical results. On the one hand, it hampers the Arabs' preparations for war and the co-ordination of effort in time of war, and thus it is a factor acting against war. On the other hand, plurality produces competition. Each Arab state tries to outbid the others in what is popularly considered good Arab Nationalism. It thus serves as an obstacle in the way of any settlement. Furthermore, this competition dialectically produces a predisposition towards extremism.

*Fatah's* example of inflicting damage on the enemy could only arouse applause by the Arab public. Criticizing *Fatah* for its deeds was tantamount to defending Israel. *Fedayeen* became a fashion in the Arab world. Many similar organizations sprang into being imitating *Fatah's* example. Even semantically the term *Fedayeen*, as its root is from 'sacrifice', produces the appeal

of heroism. The PLO could not stay behind. Shuqeiri announced that the 'Palestinian Army' would be *Fedayeen*. A *Fedayeen* organization, 'The Heroes of Return', was established within PLO ranks by an internal opposition group.

The fear of premature embroilment in a war slowly faded out as self-confidence grew. The UAR, which at first considered *Fatah's* activities as irresponsible, slowly came round to countenancing them. The UAR herself set up a regular *Fedayeen* battalion.

#### *The Theory of Detonation*

*Fatah* supposed that the Arab states, headed by the UAR, had already achieved superiority over Israel. Declarations to this effect were made by Arab spokesmen and averred by Arab publicists. They reasoned that the long years of preparations, and the big arsenal the Soviet Union had provided had already ensured a victory over Israel.

*Fatah* deemed that what was missing was only a push of sorts to overcome the hesitations of the Arab states in taking the plunge. These hesitations, *Fatah* reasoned, resulted from inhibitions rooted in membership of the UN and a natural apprehension at a momentous decision to initiate war. Furthermore, the Arab states were diverted by their rivalries and internal problems. Thus, by provoking Israeli retaliations, the Palestinian action would act as a catalyst in bringing about a war. *Fatah* action would serve as the detonator to ignite it. In this view *Fatah* parted company with Shuqeiri and others who explained that the Palestinians might more easily start hostilities against Israel as they were not members of the UN. Their action would be understood and even justified by world public opinion. The theory of detonation was the parallel of the 'Argument of Embroilment'. If in some aspects *Fatah* erred, its prophecy that its action would bring war, even if indirectly, came true in the six-day war.

### **5. *Fedayeen* after the Six-day War**

The tremendous potential of the Arab masses, as described by the Syrians and *Fatah*, did not materialize in the six-day war. It was a clash between regular forces in which neither the masses



nor *Fatah* had any function. The shock of defeat and the wreckage of its own theories paralysed *Fatah* for a while. Then *Fatah* awoke to the realization that a new situation had been produced as new areas with a large Arab population came under Israel's military control. It seemed that the classical pattern of a Revolutionary War from within could now be applied, and that *Fatah's* great hour had come. People and weapons were hastily smuggled to the West Bank. Yasser 'Arafat himself came to lead the organization of his network. Some groups began to be active. However, almost all their cells were detected by the Israeli authorities and their members were put in prison. In a matter of a few weeks the whole network collapsed. New attempts to set up an organizational network followed towards the end of the year, and these too were thwarted.

Success in foiling *Fatah's* activities was due both to the efficiency of the Israeli organization and to *Fatah's* weaknesses. The army tried to seal off the Jordan Valley – the main avenue of entrance. The Security Service detected and identified *Fedayeen* members and they were arrested. Information relating to any movement of *Fedayeen* units in the field was flashed to the Army and the Frontier Guard, who could speedily be called upon to chase them.

Even if the manpower element of *Fedayeen* improved as students began to volunteer, the general level, operationally and organizationally, was low.<sup>1</sup> *Fedayeen* members knew that there was no death sentence in Israel and that by surrendering they could save their lives and risk only a prison sentence. *Fedayeen* members have been extraordinarily ready to collaborate with the Israeli authorities, even if afterwards at their public trials they posed as national heroes.

As *Fatah* cells were liquidated from the beginning, they had no time to take root. Prophecies by visitors from abroad that Israel would have a 'second Vietnam', a 'second Algeria', or a 'second Aden', only reflected the predictors' national traumas, and did not come true. Swiftly and with comparative ease, Israel overcame the problems of counter-insurgency. Henceforth, the main task is not counter-insurgency in its usual sense of destroying the insurgents' network, but rather the prevention of penetration by their agents and the setting up of the organization.

#### *Failure to Stir Civil Resistance*

It is a dogma in all modern guerrilla warfare theories that success is first and foremost dependent on the mobilization of mass support as a means of disruption of the government's functioning by civil resistance, and a source providing for recruitment, intelligence, and supply. *Fatah* failed in all these.

Israel's policy in the occupied areas was aimed at the restoration of normal life as far as the conditions allowed. All possible roles, except security, were left to local government authorities – municipalities and village councils, and Military Government intervention was limited to the barest minimum. The desire to return to normalcy was shared by the population, in order to minimize its sufferings. Thus, the stirring up of troubles clashed with the interests of the population. Being on the spot, they realized that resistance would harm the Arabs much more than Israel. The West Bank inhabitants did not believe in efficiency of resistance as a means of driving out the Israeli Army, a task which the Arab regular armies with their superior means had failed to achieve. Their leaders were apprehensive that as a result of civil strife and the repressive measures it would entail, the Arab community would disintegrate and flee, and the territory would be 'de-Arabized'. They deemed that their first national obligation was to preserve the Arabness of the West Bank, even if it meant refusing to collaborate with *Fatah* and the other organizations. The efforts of the Jordanian Government and others to call general strikes usually failed. Palestinians still remember the 1936 general strike, the main suffering in which devolved on the Arabs.

Israel's policy of counter-terror punishment served as a deterrence. It was applied selectively. The individuals who were found to collaborate with the *Fedayeens* were severely punished by the blowing up of their private houses. No collective punishment was imposed, so that people knew that if they did not collaborate they would not suffer any harm. The choice was given to them personally.

Refusal to collaborate with *Fatah* does not mean that the population wishes Israel to stay, or that it does not sympathize with *Fatah* and rejoice in listening to its announcements. If these people admire *Fatah* for national reasons, they are more sceptical about its capabilities. The readiness of



*Fatah* members to inform on each other was well known by the population, as they witnessed how one arrest led to the arrest of many. Sympathy towards *Fedayeen* action remained mostly on the abstract level and has not been translated into action. The *Fedayeen* organizations seemed too weak and fragile, and their action too sporadic to inspire the confidence needed for swaying the public. Though leadership in the West Bank is fragmented, as there is no generally recognized leadership, *Fatah's* claim on the allegiance of the population conflicted with the traditional structure of leadership. The local leaders were reluctant to forgo their position. *Fatah's* commanders sent from outside were in many cases considered foreigners and treated with suspicion.

*Fatah* failure is magnified when one considers the ease of mingling its emissaries among the large number of Arabs who were allowed by the Israeli authorities to move back and forth between the West Bank and Jordan.

*Fatah* has not embarked on internal terrorist action to coerce the population to join its ranks, not so much because of excessive squeamishness as because of the precariousness of its hold. Probably another restraining factor against coercive terror was the Palestinians' memories from the period 1936-39 when internal Arab terror wrought havoc in Arab society, as in many cases it only served as a cover for personal vendetta.

#### *Mode of Operations*

As the network inside the West Bank was to all practical purposes liquidated, *Fatah* action was thrown back to the days before the six-day War. *Fatah* had to resort to short forays across the Jordan, to harass the Jewish settlements in the Beit-Shan and Jordan Valley south of the Lake of Tiberias. Though most of the Jordan Valley is open ground, near the banks of the river, the terrain is undulating and bushy, providing some hideouts. When intercepted, these *Fedayeen* groups got covering fire from Jordanian regular units. In many cases such actions developed into mortar and artillery duels from both sides of the river. Damage to the villages were caused much more by artillery shelling than by *Fedayeen* activities.<sup>2</sup> Suffering on the Israeli side during all this period was concentrated in this region. How-

ever, if Jewish villagers had to spend part of their time in shelters, no village was deserted, whereas on the other side of the Jordan thousands of farmers left the area, and joined the refugee camps inside Jordan.

*Fatah* transferred its bases from Syria to Jordan. *Fatah* members moved freely in Jordan in uniform and marked cars. Their bases became an extraterritorial *Fedayeen* enclave. Most of these activities started from Jordan. Incidents over the Suez Canal have been between regular armies.

According to Israel's record, from the six-day war up to its first anniversary the Jordanian troops fired 165 times on Israel army units or settlements. 140 *Fedayeen* incursions took place.\*

The sealing of the Jordan Valley was gradually improved by patrols, ambushes and technical means. The *Fedayeen* casualty toll resulting from penetration of the Jordan Valley is exorbitant by any scale. It strikes terror in their ranks. The number of incidents inside Israeli-controlled territory declined as the *Fedayeen* network was mopped up. As penetration of the Jordan Valley became so difficult, the main mode of operation was opening fire from the other side of the river by both *Fedayeen* and Jordanian troops. Clashes in the West Bank between Israel army units and *Fedayeen* mainly arose not through *Fedayeen* initiative but rather army ambushes and pursuits. There were few cases of firing mortars and rockets on settlements, and few cases of terrorism in urban areas. Twice demolition sets in cinemas in Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv were found and dismantled. Grenades were placed in litter bins in Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv central bus station and at Hebron. An El Al plane was hijacked to Algeria. There are no *Fedayeen* units roving in the West Bank, nor in any other region under Israeli control.

In the period from the six-day war up to 20 October 1968 Israel suffered the following casualties (data from Army Spokesman) - see top of p. 28.

Israel launched several retaliatory actions against *Fedayeen* bases inside Jordan. The largest was a combined operation of armour, infantry, artillery and air force against Karamah (20 March 1968), the central *Fedayeen* base in Jordan several miles east of the river Jordan. It developed into

\* Figures are from the Israeli Chief Education Officer's *Monthly Survey*, 1968, No. 5.



	Military		Civilian	
	killed	wounded	killed	wounded
Jordan Valley and West Bank*	96**	323**	23	214
UAR***	97	275	2	4
Syria	7	22	—	1
Gaza Strip	4	35	4	19

\* As *Fedayeen* and Jordanian troops acted together it is impossible to differentiate.  
 \*\* Including 28 killed and 90 wounded in Karamah.  
 \*\*\* Including the casualties from the sinking of the *Eilat* of 47 dead and 91 wounded.

an engagement with Jordanian regular units. Most of the 28 Israeli dead and 90 wounded resulted from the Jordanian fire. The Karamah *Fedayeen* bases were occupied and destroyed. About 170 *Fedayeen* were killed.

A few days after Karamah, a small airborne raid took place against a *Fedayeen* base in the Arava south of the Dead Sea. The *Fedayeen* moved their bases deeper in Jordanian territory to As-Salt. The policy of hitting bases inside Jordanian territory, thus preventing the formation of a sanctuary, continued when As-Salt bases were hit from the air on 4 July 1968.

#### *False Reporting*

A revealing study would be to compare *Fatah's* communiqués with what actually occurred. One can assume that in clandestine organizations there are bound to be some inaccuracies in reporting, due to the nature of the operations and difficulties in communication. *Fatah* distortions are not of this nature. They exceed, by far, any reasonable margin of mishaps in reporting.<sup>3</sup> They show deliberate falsification. Perhaps this manifests an inclination to downgrade reality and give prominence to the internal experiences of emotions and desires.<sup>4</sup> The frequency of false reporting is very baffling indeed. As a trend it is a continuation of the days before the six-day war. However, as the gap between pretension and performance widened after the war, pressure to close it by concocted reports increased.

Some highlights are: that a *Fatah* unit opened

fire on the 'rear' of the Independence Day military parade in Jerusalem, that General Rabin's garage was blown up, that General Dayan was wounded, that the explosion in the Zion cinema in Jerusalem took place, that the Military Commander's house in Jericho was blown up, that hundreds of Israeli soldiers have been killed and wounded in mysterious and unknown incidents, that military installations have been attacked.

Often the same incident was hastily claimed by more than one *Fedayeen* organization. The wish that the same incident might have been theirs, prevailed over prudently waiting for a report.<sup>5</sup> Sometimes a mishap in Israel, such as a big road accident or a fire in a public building, announced in the Israeli press, is immediately claimed by one or more *Fedayeen* organizations as their feat. It should be noted that this proclivity to lies and exaggerations in *Fedayeen* announcements is discussed in the Arab press.<sup>6</sup>

Falsification may temporarily help. It is not sheer optimism to believe that in the longer term it must have adverse results. Internally, lying must have been a great weakness in *Fatah*, producing an atmosphere of suspicion and disbelief. Lies often misfired. There were cases of students who, when joining *Fatah*, were told of atrocities perpetrated by the Israelis in their villages. When they found that they had been misled, they did not carry out the instructions they had been given.

False communiqués by *Fatah* adversely affected the Israelis, as it is difficult to respect an adversary who resorts to such blatant lies.



Nothing was more difficult for *Fatah* to stomach than its failure to establish bases in the occupied territory. Consequently it endeavours to prove that it does have an organization there. Of course, it may have a few remnants who can even act sometimes; nevertheless, they are not a viable organization.

*Fedayeen* activities in general came to be called 'Resistance' (*Muqawama*). That, too, is a falsehood in terminology, and a semantic lie motivated by the psychological need to suggest that the people actively resist the foreign intruder. The natural negative attitude of Arabs towards the Israeli occupation, whose concrete expression is mostly verbal and sometimes in demonstrations is thus elevated, by calling it Resistance. 'Resistance' has come mostly from outside the area.

#### *Fatah as Cherished Hero*

In terms of propaganda, *Fatah's* operations were a success. After the six-day war, and especially after the Karamah operation, *Fatah's* appeal and prestige in Arab countries spiralled.

The fascination that the ideas of the guerrilla exerted on the younger generation of Palestinians is understandable. All the other avenues of combatting Israel, so vehemently discussed in Arab circles, proved to be of no avail, and did not bring the expected results; economic boycott, political pressure, efforts to isolate Israel in the international arena, Arab League meetings with optimistic proclamations, Summit Meetings in which 'Unity of Action' was transformed into fraternal rivalries, the Palestine Liberation Organization with its offices and congresses, Soviet aid – all failed. Israel's progress was not hampered and stood in stark contrast to a malaise in most of the Arab states. The war, which had been so acclaimed in the euphoria of the last two weeks of May 1967, became a national catastrophe. The strain of the passage from wild hopes to dejection compressed in a few days reinforced the impact. Precisely because the objective seemed to be within easy reach frustration became more bitter. *Fedayeen* warfare seemed the only formula that still could turn the tide. Analogies were drawn from success stories elsewhere. Guerrilla warfare seemed a spell by which the weak could still prevail over the powerful.

The new style of *Fatah* with its emphasis on action, sacrifice, and anonymity of leadership had an attraction in a society where leadership is usually equated with exploitation of position for personal benefits. The Palestinians who suffered from many disabilities and whose activities were constricted by the Arab states would now prove their mettle. Guerrilla warfare would initiate them into the international brotherhood of revolutionaries, the brave, the destroyers of the old corrupt order, and the creators of the new.

For the non-Palestinian Arabs it was both a source of solace and pride. Bravery, which as a self-identification value has occupied such an important place in Arab culture, had not died out. Guerrilla warfare would compensate for the shame of defeat. If Arabs had proved weak in war, they were still resilient, persevering, never accepting defeat and submitting to the enemy. They would carry on the fight. June 1967 was only a lost battle, the war would go on.

Intellectually, *Fatah's* argumentations could fulfil a need for a theory or an ideology to buttress the Arab position in the conflict. If ideological fervour has declined in the West, the Arabs are still living in an ideological era. Even if an outsider may judge that *Fatah's* reasonings are shallow, and that its ideology is no more than phraseology, it does not diminish its persuasiveness for the converted, or for those who wish to be persuaded. It is fairly cohesive, and its gaps must not necessarily seem of consequence to the Arabs.

The psychological function fulfilled by the idea of the guerrilla produces a need to believe in *Fatah's* inflated or false reporting. Probably people did have their suspicions, as the lessons they learnt from Arab governmental reporting, whose falsehood was proved beyond any doubt, made them hesitant and disbelieving, or even sullen. There is a wide credibility gap in Arab countries. Still, so long as *Fatah's* reporting was not proved false, the wish to believe had the upper hand, even if some doubts still lingered.

If previously part of the Arab press was hesitant to publish *Fatah* communiqués, now they were given full publicity. The Arab press is full of reports on its feats, descriptions of visits in its camps, interviews with leaders, discussing their ideas and citing their slogans. All written in the most laudatory manner.



### *Support by Governments*

The trend towards official support of guerrilla activities started before the six-day war. Though immediately after the war, Algeria and Syria put forward the suggestion that a Popular War of National Liberation be started, Nasser rejected the suggestion.

The six-day war was a blatant refutation of the ideas of the People's Liberation War. Nevertheless, Syria's official attachment to this cherished doctrine only grew, as often happens 'when prophecy fails' (as analysed by Professor Festinger and others). Syria could interpret the growing support by the Arab public of *Fedayeen* action as a vindication of the line she was the first to champion. People's Liberation War became even more pressing as a means of liberation of the Golan Heights.

First the UAR press, and then official spokesmen came openly to support guerrilla action. President Nasser on several occasions (such as his speeches on 23 November 1967 and 10 April 1968) referred to the *Fedayeen*, and endorsed their action. The UAR placed training facilities and officers at their disposal. The UAR radio provided a daily hour of broadcasting in which *Fatah* described their feats and gave publicity to their ideas.

Jordan moved more slowly. If at first she opposed *Fedayeen* action and even tried to prevent it, support by public opinion swayed the Government and the King. After Karamah King Hussein himself made a pronouncement implying support.

Nowadays, Arab leaders vie with each other in expressing support for *Fedayeen* action as the inalienable right of the Palestinians to fight for regaining their land. Still, the relationships between the Arab governments and the *Fedayeen* is not free from ambiguities which may one day erupt.

### *Fatah Becomes a Political Factor*

From a clandestine organization existing thanks to Syrian support, *Fatah* became a political factor in the Arab world. After the Karamah operation Yasser 'Arafat discarded his anonymity and became the official spokesman of *Fatah*. His company is now sought by statesmen and journalists.

*Fatah* now overshadows to some extent the Palestine Liberation Organization which lost standing and prestige as a result of the defeat, the eclipse of Shuqeiri, and its internal rivalries. *Fatah's* refusal to accept the authority of PLO, dating from the previous period, became a bid by *Fatah* for the leadership of the Palestinians, by virtue of *Fatah's* pioneering of the 'Palestinian Revolution'. *Fatah* now makes open declarations of policy, which do not always tally with the Arab states' declared position.

Though most of the Arab governments announced their acceptance of the Jarring Mission, *Fatah* pronounced vigorously its rejection of any compromise settlement or any political solution, short of the 'complete restoration of Palestine to the Arabs'. The PLO and other Palestinian organizations did not assume a milder position and followed suit.

President Nasser formulated the Arab objective in the present stage as 'the wiping out of the traces of aggression', which *prima facie* could mean inducing Israel to withdraw to the pre-war lines. However, as this formula is frequently accompanied by the conventional Arab expression of refusal to accept the existence of Israel, and insistence that all Palestine should be liberated, the 'wiping out of the traces of aggression' may have the more radical meaning of destruction of Israel, since the very existence of Israel is defined by Arabs as a continuing aggression.<sup>7</sup> The other formulation of the Arab objective 'Liberation of the Occupied Territory', is also open to two interpretations. For Egypt as a state it may mean regaining Sinai; for Egypt as a champion of Arab Nationalism it probably has a wider connotation – the liberation of all Palestine, (as Israel proper is conventionally referred to as the 'Occupied Territory').<sup>8</sup> The merit of this ambiguity in Arab expressions of their objectives is that by them Arab leaders can demonstrate 'moderation' for external consumption, and still not discard the old 'politicide' objective.

*Fatah* does not beat about the bush. It declared: 'The Palestine National Liberation Movement "*Fatah*" announced bluntly its political thought that it rejects the slogan of the wiping out of traces of aggression and all political settlements.'

A conference of the *Fedayeen* organization, convened in Cairo, decided on 19 January 1968 on a Covenant in which the third article stipulated: 'Rejection of all political solutions



substituting the liquidation of the occupying Zionist entity in Palestine'.

*Fatah* in its announcements contradicts the Arab leaders' presentation of the Arab case. That does not hinder the Arab leaders from declaring their support of *Fatah*. *Fatah* can allow itself to contradict the leaders, presumably because Arab leaders know that their own formulations are only window-dressing.

Carried away by its political successes, *Fatah* frequently tended to lose awareness of the inadequacy of guerrilla warfare previously exemplified by the 'theory of detonation', and announced that guerrilla warfare could liquidate Israel. Basically, this idea was already implied by the dogma that it was a strategy and not a tactical phase. *Fatah's* leaders declared that their war would force not only Israel's withdrawal from the areas occupied in the six-day war, but that the guerrilla base would slowly be extended, forcing Israel proper to contract, until her final demise. The Karamah operation was hailed as heralding a new stage of direct confrontation with Israel. A *Fatah* spokesman went even farther and announced in the Kuwaiti *Al-Risala* (11 March 1968) that if the Arab states gave a free hand to *Fatah* and the other organizations, they would crush Israel in three years. Such pronouncements abounded.

## 6. Guerrilla Warfare and the New Arab Strategy

Support for the ideas of *Fatah* became a necessity for anybody calling himself an Arab nationalist. However, *Fatah's* excessive claims invited a reaction in the Arab press and public of a more sober portrayal of the limitations and potentialities of guerrilla warfare within the context of the Arab-Israeli conflict. Such criticism even came from some known Palestinian Arabs.<sup>1</sup> Articles were published in the Lebanese and the Egyptian press explaining the limitations of guerrilla warfare against Israel because of such factors as the population ratio even after the occupation of the West Bank, smallness of territory, scarcity of hideouts, network of roads.<sup>2</sup>

*Fatah's* relegation of the Arab states' armies to a secondary role could not fail to elicit a reaction from Mr Heikal, who over the years

repeatedly stressed the importance of the UAR as Israel's main target and enemy, and chief champion, both politically and militarily, of the Arab cause. In several articles he reiterated the primacy of the UAR in any showdown with Israel, and stressed *Fatah's* limitations.

In an article in *Al-Ahram* of 26 January 1968, he wrote, 'I do not belittle the value of *Fedayeen* in Palestine; however, I do not charge them with the whole burden. Those who do so make their own life easy and prepare the road for escaping from responsibility. *Fedayeen's* actions cannot evict Israel from the West Bank, the Syrian plateau or the Sinai desert. The *Fedayeen's* operations have to continue as a factor of harassing Israel, keeping the issue in motion and as a reminder'.

In his article of 18 August 1968 he even expressed apprehension that the excessive reliance on guerrilla warfare would create false expectations which eventually would have adverse results on Arab morale. He said, 'Those who imagine that the resistance will have the decisive role in mopping up the traces of the Israeli aggression are in my view lazy or ill-informed. They are lazy because they want to charge others with this responsibility, saving themselves trouble, so as to be able to stay quiescent. They are ill-informed as they do not know the true facts about the confrontation with the Israeli enemy.'

'As for current circumstances in the Arab world, the Palestinian resistance is hampered, though not constricted, by factors that cannot be overcome:

1. The human ratio between resistance forces and the enemy in the occupied territory is not like the present ratio in Vietnam or Algeria... 40 million Vietnamese, while the enemy is half a million American soldiers... In Algeria ten million Arabs against an enemy of four hundred French soldiers. In Palestine inside the occupied area the Arabs are less than a million and the enemy are two million with a quarter of a million under arms.

2. The nature of the Palestinian terrain is different from Vietnam's with its thick forests, and is different from Algerian terrain with its rugged mountains... in Palestine the plains are exposed and the mountains are not spacious. Furthermore, the Palestinian land is limited and narrow, in particular taking into account an extensive use of helicopters.

3. Around Vietnam there are sanctuaries in which resistance can prepare itself out of the enemy's



reach, such as China and North Vietnam. The situation was similar in Algeria, with Tunisia and Morocco next door, and Libya and Egypt close by. The Palestinian resistance does not have such sanctuaries in which it can prepare itself out of reach of the enemy. The enemy is prepared to strike at any place in the Arab world, which in the present situation is defeated and has not yet recovered its strength.'

In the past the UAR official stand was a straightforward negation of *Fatah* activities, as they might embroil the Arabs in a premature war. The position is now modified. The bone of contention is only how important is the role of the guerrilla: is it the main weapon, as *Fatah* claims, or only a secondary and support weapon? The importance of the components of Arab strategic mix are reversed. Mr Heikal devalues *Fedayeen* warfare though by doing so he repudiates *Fatah's* pretensions. He does it with great tact, as his criticism is intertwined in a beautiful and warm obituary of one of the *Fatah* leaders, whom he befriended.

Mr Heikal explains: 'The importance of the role of resistance is not reduced, on the contrary it is multiplied, rendering it a necessity, political, military, and human:

1. To continue to strike during the period between the two battles, that of 5 June in which the Arab world was defeated, and the inevitable battle to rectify it. I cannot state when it will come, but ineluctably it will come, as the possibilities of a political solution recede. In this period between the battles there is a need for fuel so that the flame will not go out.

2. The continuation of the resistance has an important effect on morale, as it eliminates the fear that the Israeli enemy wants to implant in the heart of Arab fighters.<sup>3</sup>

Nothing can accomplish that more than the advance of hundreds of youths to confront the enemy, open fire against him and receive his fire, without hiding behind armour or planes which overshadow the sun.

3. Resistance is causing to the enemy material inconvenience and psychological bewilderment.

4. By strengthening its positions, despite all obstacles, the resistance may be able to play an important role in the battle with the enemy behind his lines, when the decisive hour comes.

5. Resistance, and this is the human aspect of its role, will symbolize the Palestinian element, the existence of which propaganda has tried to eliminate,

and wipe out even the sheer feeling of its existence.

6. Finally, the resistance – by its bravery and sacrifice – particularly because of the enemy's overwhelming superiority, will provide the Arab struggle with its finest legends and epics. This will touch the hearts and will instigate zeal which will be able to reverse the current.'

The circle is thus completed. *Fatah* correctly pointed out the weaknesses of the strategy of liquidating Israel by a conventional war. Mr Heikal pointed out why guerrilla action cannot accomplish it either.

Mr Heikal stresses the psychological role of *Fatah* not only for the Palestinians, but for the Arab armies so demoralized by their debacle. The humiliation and shame from this defeat go so deep that they may themselves constitute factors of historical importance. No foreign observer can fathom the profundity of Arab agony. If shame kindles a burning desire for revenge, the memories of defeat serve as a deterrent. The balance between these two factors may yet determine the fate of the young generation in the Middle East. The emotionalism of shame may prevail over the rationality of deterrence. In any case, the preparedness of the Arabs cannot be measured by hardware, personnel, training and operational planning, as much as by the extent to which they have overcome the trauma of their defeat. High commands in the Arab armies may stage limited military actions in order to bolster the self-confidence of the troops. *Fedayeen* actions, too, will be crowned with an heroic aura for the same purpose.

Mr Heikal continued the analysis of Arab strategy in which he has been engaged for the last year in another article of 23 August 1968. He explained that henceforth the liquidation of Israel would be achieved not by a lightning all-out offensive, as had been advocated previously, but by a gradual, piecemeal series of defeats: 'We shall commit a mistake if we imagine that the first victory over the enemy will be the last. Our victory in the coming battle – a victory which is possible – will not be the final end. For the enemy it will be only the beginning of the end. Even after achieving victory, the present international circumstances do not permit us to liquidate Israel. Nevertheless, our first victory will make us confront another Israel differing from the present one.'



'Looking back to the Crusaders' state and its history which is analogous to Israel's, we shall find that this state did not end by the first victory over it. Rather, with the passage of long years victories followed one after the other, until the Crusaders realized that there was no room for their state in the midst of the Arab East, and so their state started to disintegrate.'

Though this approach is not completely new – Heikal alluded to it in previous articles – its clarity may signify a landmark in Arab thinking. Of course there is no certainty that an article by a journalist, even one as important as Mr Heikal, reflects the strategic thinking of the UAR. Though frequently in history, in order to learn of a nation's grand policies and long-term intentions, there has been no need to resort to covert means or speculations. They were there for all to see, in declarations, speeches, articles and books. The main importance of Heikal's article is that it helps to elucidate another possibility in the spectrum of Arab strategy polarized between guerrilla revolutionary war at one end and an all-out war *à outrance* at the other.

The lesson that there is no short cut to the final victory and the disappearance of Israel, has mostly been learnt. Nevertheless, the hope of liquidating Israel has not faded. Israel's end will come, Mr Heikal speculates, not by a single spectacular event, but as the cumulative result of a long drawn-out series of reverses. His assumption is that Israel is not capable of absorbing reverses, so that the first will serve as an historical turning point from which others will follow. Presumably, Mr Heikal theorizes that, in order to develop and attract immigration, success is imperative for Israel. Until now, Israel's power stems from her being a success story. This current of success has to be reversed. Once having suffered reverses Israel will lose heart and disintegrate.

This version of strategy may signify, too, the manner in which UAR representatives present their case to the Soviet Union. It is more palatable for the Soviet leaders than to be asked to participate in the destruction of Israel. They need only assist the Arabs, or grant them one small victory, no more than a *mini-victory*.

The UAR perhaps points out to the Soviets the need of one limited victory even for the sake of national therapy and for the historical record.

Mr Heikal in another article (27 June 1968) stated that 'the bitterness of the 5 June story will sink in the national consciousness for a long time, as with the battle of Navarino in October 1827... unless Arab arms succeed in taking their revenge in a battle, the result of which is clear-cut, as only victory can wipe out the shame of defeat'.

One may surmise that the Arabs still hope that a first reverse may be achieved if Israel is forced to withdraw to the previous lines. They call it 'a political solution of the present crisis', which to them means not a resolution of the conflict, but only mustering political pressure to force Israel to withdraw.

Mr Heikal's article signifies in some sense a return to the conventional strategy, though actually the UAR has never discarded it. The level of strength needed to liquidate Israel in a short war was a high one and the period of preparations long. It might seem to UAR strategists that for a *mini-victory* they need fewer forces. Thus, this new thinking might tempt UAR military circles to consider the timing of such a war earlier than had they still adhered to the old strategy, and they may be pressing for a limited showdown. Though the military are precisely those who suffered the shock of defeat, which made them apprehensive of similar adventures, they are those who more than others feel the need for wiping out the shame of defeat and regaining dignity.<sup>4</sup> The new command would like to show that they are better than their predecessors. The possibility that the new strategy has enhanced the chances of war cannot be discarded.

## 7. Living with the Conflict

The feats of guerrilla warfare culminating in China, and in Vietnam have made a great impression on the present generation. The guerrilla warrior is ensured of sympathy and even admiration, irrespective of the merit of

<sup>4</sup>Evoking Navarino may imply an intention to belittle the defeat in June 1967 as actually Navarino has been viewed in Egypt more as a setback to a dynasty, whose glory has now faded out, than a national disaster. Egypt is thus defeated only by hostile alliances, collusion, and plots.



his case, or his performance. *Fatah* is no exception.

Nevertheless, the chief yardstick for judging a military operation is how far it accomplishes the objective towards which it was aimed. *Fatah's* leaders have pretended that their activities would bring about the destruction of the state of Israel. There is no need to belittle the inconveniences, or troubles, subversive activities could cause to Israel. No society can be immune to such terrorist acts as the setting off of demolition sets in public places. In real terms, what the *Fedayeen* organizations have so far achieved is not more than *sporadic terrorism*, which does not at all deserve even to be called guerrilla warfare.<sup>1</sup> At the most it is *pseudo-guerrilla*. Even if they expanded their terrorist activities, a contingency which it would be futile to ignore, they will always fall short of their objective of destroying Israel. Their actions have the merit of harassment or, as Mr Heikal described it, of filling somehow the gap between the present stage and a future war; *Fatah* is not satisfied with such a task.

The greatest failing of the *Fedayeen* organizations has been their inability to establish bases in the West Bank and stir a real civil resistance movement. Even if they succeed in fomenting some civil strife in the West Bank it will damage the Arab inhabitants more than those of Israel. The West Bank and the Gaza Strip are separate areas which can be isolated. Such civil resistance will not disrupt the functioning of government in Israel.

There was some woolliness in *Fatah's* thinking. *Fatah* often tended to acquit itself with verbal solutions. *Fatah* ideologists blamed the previous generation for its verbosity. However, it is doubtful whether they had freed themselves from the grip of words. Defining the issue of the Arab-Israel conflict as central for all the Arab countries was not enough to make it so. *Fatah's* contentions that all the troubles in the Arab world came from Israel could not be persuasive. *Fatah's* demands that all Arab states subordinate their interests to the struggle against Israel could not be implemented, and the behaviour of all Arab states, 'Reactionary' or 'Progressive', was a proof of this. The Palestinians have resented the Arab states using them as a pawn in inter-Arab rivalries. By the same token, the Arab states could not acquiesce in their satel-

lization to the Palestinian Arabs. Despite the preachings of *Fatah*, the Palestinian problem cannot be the central concern of all the Arab states.

While the general trend among guerrilla leaders has been to consider guerrilla warfare as a transitory, ancillary stage to be transcended and transformed into regular warfare, the general tenor in *Fatah's* publications is to consider it the principal element and the centre of war, 'a *strategy* and not *tactics*' as they define it. *Fatah* knows that it cannot establish a defended base either in the occupied territories or in Israel proper. It cannot go farther than the present mode of operation of infiltration on a small scale, urban terrorism, and exchange of fire across the border. Thus, it has to rely on an invasion of Israel by the Arab regular armies. But then we are back with conventional Arab strategy.

In *Fatah* writings there is a lack of serious consideration of the relationship between the objective and the means to attain it. The realization that guerrilla-terrorist activities are the only avenue now open to the Arabs, does not mean that it is an efficient one. *Fatah* is so much engrossed with the idea of the omnipotence of guerrilla warfare that it ignores its basic limitations. Though the commitment and risks of a guerrilla fighter are of a high order, objectives of guerrilla warfare are inherently limited. It can change a regime or persuade a foreign government to give up a colony when it becomes burdensome. The FLN in Algeria could induce the French Government to relinquish its rule in Algeria, but no amount of guerrilla fighting could force the French Government to give up France.

Guerrilla warfare can succeed in some definite circumstances which do not exist in the Arab-Israel conflict as Alush and Heikal testified. Guerrilla is only a kind of warfare. Nations may use it to achieve their independence. However, not all guerrilla actions are *ipso facto* wars of national liberation. Calling the Arab-Israel conflict a war of national liberation is only a quibble. The Arab-Israel conflict is a clash between nations on incompatible claims to the same territory.<sup>2</sup> In such a case, terror cannot be the alternative to war in its most classical sense. Guerrilla warfare can be important mostly in *intra-state* war, not in *inter-state* war.



As *Fatah* does not specify how to bridge the gap between its actions and aims, its violence becomes a goal for its own sake – violence for the purpose of satisfying psychological motivation and the urge for vengeance. Education in brutality cannot be directed only outwards. It may rebound and take its toll internally, in the Arab states themselves.

*Fatah* indulges in romanticizing on the tremendous might stored in the Palestinians and the Arab nation. Still, one may suspect that the Arabs' weakness lies in the human factor.<sup>3</sup> No doubt the idea that man is stronger than the machine, and that man's will shall prevail over technology, has great allure and appeal. In its sublimity and stupidity go side by side. No amount of idealism in one's soul can make a difference to the effects of a bullet in one's head. True, the example of sacrifice can be a source of inspiration. However, it too may founder on the stark facts of reality.

Arabs discussing the six-day war frequently refer to their lack of a scientific attitude as a main reason for their debacle. *Fatah's* writings, notwithstanding their pretensions, also show lack of a rigorous scrutiny of its problem. No modernistic alchemy can transform verbal formulas into effective force. No amount of persuasion can conjure up a war of national liberation when it does not exist. No coherent action can follow from incoherent thought. Thus, illusions, disillusionment, and suffering may ensue.

Many times in the history of wars, people erred in belittling their adversary's capacity for absorbing destruction or reverses. Many Israelis erred in their evaluation, motivated by the hope that the Arabs' defeat would force them to resign themselves to coexistence with Israel. Mr Heikal is mistaken in his evaluation that one reverse for Israel would be a turning point. *Fatah* is grossly mistaken in its assessment, based on wishful thinking, that Israel is not capable of pursuing a protracted conflict. It contradicts *Fatah's* own evaluation that the time factor favours Israel. Sitting on the banks of the Suez Canal and the Jordan is a small strain on Israel: its pinch is on the Arabs.

Arab evaluation of Israel's frailty is based on a belief that has become a tenet in Arab ideology, that Israel's nationalism is artificial or hybrid; the Jews, being, as they describe them, a religion

and not a nation, are not capable of sustaining a proper nationalism of their own. Israelis' attachment to their state is therefore weak, and the state itself is bound to collapse. Likewise, Zionism has been imposed on the majority of Israelis and they would like to emigrate, or those Jews originating from the Arab countries are waiting impatiently to end Western Zionists' domination, and are potential allies of the Arabs against Zionism.

Arabs attribute their defeat in June 1967 to lack of knowledge of Israel. There can be no more glaring an example of ignorance of Israel than these views. They are not due to lack of information on the part of the Arabs, but to distortions made to fit their preconceived notions. The attachment of the Jews to the holy land has been a very strong bond anchored in the deepest strata of their consciousness. The six-day war reinforced it, as old memories and emotions came to the surface. Israeli nationalism and patriotism are strong, and the individual is ready to make sacrifices for the state and withstand a long conflict. Israel's resilience is very considerable. The record of her citizens in an uphill struggle for the establishment of the state against so many odds attests to this. Arabs seem not to understand that it is precisely the Oriental Jews who bear a grudge against the Arabs, more than any other sector of the population in Israel. The Arab menace itself has been an important factor for integration and unity in Israel.

Has the emergence of *Fatah* changed the nature of the conflict? The 'Palestinization' of the Arab side in the conflict may make its solution more difficult. Still, the Palestinians are not their own masters, as an autonomous factor in the conflict. Their dependence on Arab states is very considerable. The 'Palestinization' of the conflict in itself is less important than the interest of Arab states to support it, an interest which was accentuated by the six-day war. The UAR's greater concern with the conflict, the growth of the involvement in the conflict of the man in the street, the intellectuals and students smarting from the wounds of defeat, are far more important than the emergence of *Fatah*. *Fatah* has a symbolic value as a reflection of the mood of the younger Palestinian generation. The intensification of the conflict as it is now is due mainly to the war and not to *Fatah* activities.



*Fatah* signifies a new style in the Palestinian Arab stand of readiness for sacrifice. *Fatah* and the new generation criticize the general pattern of Arab behaviour in the conflict for lack of seriousness, talking, shirking responsibility, and lack of public spirit. *Fatah* calling for personal sacrifice may seem a refreshing manifestation deserving sympathy. The tragedy of the situation is that, irrespective of *Fatah's* ideals or understandable grievances, as its purpose is the destruction of Israel, Israel will strike back.

Despite its mediocre operational achievements, *Fatah* is not a passing phenomenon. It is here to stay at least for the foreseeable future. A process of bureaucratization may take place in its command. To be a functionary in the *Fedayeen* organization will become a way of living. Thus *Fatah* will trade on Arab calamities and sufferings as previous Arab movements have done. The old patterns of oriental leadership, perhaps now partially submerged, may assert themselves with their unattractive features. In Freud's language, it will be 'the return of the repressed'. Thus the rot may set in. The wide gap between the hopes *Fatah* fired and its performance may even accelerate this process.<sup>4</sup>

In the long run *Fedayeen* action may appear another prescription that failed, another in a series of false dawns which the Arabs have entertained *vis-à-vis* Israel. Precisely because great hopes were pinned on it, its failure may have the dialectical result of the Arabs abandoning hope of destroying Israel, and resigning themselves to coexistence.

The main lesson to be drawn from the history of recent years is that the Arab-Israel conflict may be protracted. The public in Israel is learning the lesson that there is no short cut to a peaceful settlement. Actually, that could have been learnt a long time ago; but the six-day war fired new hopes.

The significance of the organization of the Palestinians and their activism was not understood in Israel. The future historian will presumably wonder how, in the year 1965, in which there was such a jump in aggravation of the Arab position *vis-à-vis* Israel, there was in Israel more inclination to observe encouraging signs of a mellowing in the Arab position than ever before. No doubt Israel has been blessed with a devoted and gifted leadership. Like all leaderships, it endeavoured to be a source of

optimism. Perhaps in its sanguine prognostications of a change in the Arab position there was, as well, a psychological element, for people may be apprehensive that their description of a conflict in all its severity might affect the conflict adversely. Hoping for the magic of the 'self-fulfilling prophecy' is a common human tendency. Yet by themselves words are not enough to change reality, as *Fatah* will learn as well. Prophecies of an improvement in the situation do not necessarily oblige it to comply. Israel's leadership has many achievements to its credit. It has now to address itself to the task of preparing the public for a long drawn-out conflict. Living in a conflict is not only a military or political affair, but also an educational one. Education of the public for living in a conflict situation will become important elsewhere in the world in our present age of discontent, as tensions and conflicts multiply in so many societies. The possibilities of a neurosis of conflict cannot be overlooked. In Israel's case, there is a factor of aggravation, as by the dialectics of antagonism the adversary's objective of destruction makes impossible a soft stance on Israel's part, and may lead to greater harshness. People have to be taught and accustom themselves to live with the conflict, and even to take it in their stride; to see reality as it is, without looking for scapegoats and artificial easy solutions which will court disappointment; not to indulge in illusions about the adversary's intentions, cruel as they may be, or try to embellish them, as was frequently the case in Israel; to understand that the adversary too may have dreams and grievances for which he may be ready to fight and offer sacrifices; to realize that one has to live for ever with the adversary in close neighbourhood, and therefore that considerations should go beyond the present circumstances of hostility; to know how to react, when a provocation should be swallowed, even if unpalatable, and when drastic action is in order. A conflict calls forth both bravery and forbearance.

The Israelis, and encouragingly the younger generation, have matured to see and understand their reality and predicament. Their optimism is rightly directed towards Israel's possibilities of withstanding the conflict; about its resolution in the foreseeable future, they tend to be less sanguine.



Sporadic subversion may become a feature in our lives for a length of time that no one can foresee; it might become like the toll in traffic accidents which modern societies have to pay. The challenge that Israel has to face does not lie in guerrilla warfare but elsewhere, on the one hand – in war. In the words of a young draftee addressing his girl in a Hebrew song: 'Whenever

we stroll we are three – You, I, and the next war . . . When we smile in a minute of love, the next war smiles with us.' On the other hand – the challenge lies in the complexities and dilemmas in which Israel finds herself enmeshed, some existed before and the six-day war highlighted them, others were created by it, but all are inherent in any scheme for a settlement.



## Notes

### I. Introduction

1. About thirty *Fedayeen* groups have announced their formation. Some have not reported any action and it seems that they have been disbanded. These groups are extremely volatile. Their names are changed frequently and their composition, it seems, is in continuous flux. The three most important organizations are '*Fatah*', the PLO group called 'The People's Liberation Forces', and 'The People's Front for the Liberation of Palestine' (abbreviated *Jabha*, composed of several groups and partially affiliated with the Qammiun). *Fedayeen* organizations have names such as 'The Heroes of the Return', 'The Youth of Vengeance', 'The Pioneers of Sacrifice', 'The Front of Palestine Rebels', 'The Front of National Sacrifice', 'The Pioneers of Vengeance'.

The differences between these organizations were mainly of parenthood – the party, group or country that sponsored or supported them. The divergences on policy became smaller and smaller. The *Jabha* demanded that the organization of the Palestinians should be within a party framework of a social, and not only a political-national, orientation. Furthermore, it advocated the concentration of greater attention on the preparatory stage before starting action, while *Fatah* demanded prompt action. The PLO stressed that the *Fedayeen* operations should be part of a general Arab strategy and co-ordinated with it. *Fatah* insisted on the autonomy of *Fedayeen* activities, and that the meeting point of those engaged against Israel should be 'on the battlefield in the occupied territory', as attempts at co-ordination might cause dissensions and delays.

### 2. Preparing for War

1. Professor Constantine Zurayk, *The Meaning of Disaster* (Beirut: Khayat, 1956), p. 69.

Nasser: 'The Palestinian issue is fateful for all Arabs' (Speech of 23 February 1964).

2. *A Return Ticket*, in Arabic, p. 71. Nashashibi further demanded that all the Arabs would live the idea of the 'Palestine Disaster' for the whole year, and not for only two days of the year (15 May – anniversary of the establishment of

Israel, and 2 November – Balfour Declaration), that streets in Arab towns would be named to perpetuate places whose Arab names had been Hebraized, etc.

3. Nashashibi dwells at considerable length on these aspects of the national programme (*A Return Ticket*, pp. 143–46): It is necessary to ensure that the feeling of injustice becomes an ever-burning fire, that time will not weaken the hatred and the desire for vengeance. It is necessary to preserve every particle of hatred and abhorrence.

A general conference of Arab teachers decided on 10 July 1966 on the necessity to prepare 'the psychological climate for the battle of vengeance'. *Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 1, p. 308.

4. A Congress of Palestinian Writers decided (1 December 1966), 'Action should be taken to include the Palestinian subject in the curriculum of all schools and academic institutions in the Arab countries. Textbooks and other technical teaching aids, according to most modern methods, should be prepared for the different levels. The Palestinian subjects should be introduced in poems and prose in children's books.' *Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 2, p. 615.

5. See, for example, Dhuqan al-Hindawi, *The Palestinian Issue* (Amman, 1964), a textbook published by the Jordanian Ministry of Education for teaching the conflict in secondary schools. It included nine pages of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

Of special interest are the headlines for lectures to the troops published by the Department of Indoctrination in UAR Forces (*Idarat al-Taujih al-Ma'nawi*).

6. For instance, when Qassim of Iraq championed the Palestinian Entity in 1959–60, he used it as a weapon against Jordan and even against the UAR.

7. The theme of the inevitability of both war and a violent solution has been aired frequently in Arab publications (Heikal in *Al-Ahram*, 5 May 1961; Nasser, 22 February 1961; his interview with Karanjia on 6 February 1964; 8 March 1965).

8. It is an expression frequently used by Mr Ahmad Baha al-Dim, the editor of the weekly *Al-Musawwar* and the chairman of the UAR Organization of Journalists. See, for instance, his book *Israyiliat* (Cairo: Kitab al-Hilal, 1965).

9. Nasser: 'In the battle of Ein-Jalut [1260] the



Egyptian and Syrian armies converged. Consequently the Tartars were defeated and the Arab countries liberated. Arab Unity and Arab nationalism were the main weapon in defeating the Tartars' (8 May 1961).

10. Another example, Dr Hamdan in *Al-Ahram* of 13 September 1964 advocated a *Blitzkrieg* combining quick land offensive with missile attack on Israel's cities.

Lt.-Col. Abd al-Majid Farid wrote an article in *Majallat al-Faish* (The Egyptian Armed Forces Monthly, No. 70, July 1955), describing the destruction of Israel by an atomic attack on Tel-Aviv, with a plea to get atomic bombs for this purpose.

11. The same idea is reiterated in his letter of 13 March 1961 to King Hussein and elsewhere. It seems that Nasser thought of neutralizing the West not so much by the UAR forces, as by politically propitious timing in which the West would be preoccupied elsewhere, or deterred by the Soviet Union.

12. These three components of Arab strength were already described in President Nasser's *Philosophy of the Revolution*. On the use of oil against Israel, see Niquila al-Dur, *So It Was Lost and So It Will Return: the Role of the Gun and Oil in the Battle of Liberation* (Beirut, 1963); Abdalla Tariqi, *The Arab Oil, a Weapon in the Battle* (Beirut: PLO Research Center, 1967).

Mr Heikal boasted that without oil from Arab sources the Sixth Fleet would become 'floating scrap' (*Al-Ahram*, 27 December 1963). At the Khartoum Conference (September 1967) Arab leaders found out that the 'oil weapon' was two-edged, and they beat a retreat. The story of the 'oil weapon' and Arab speculations about its use are most revealing of the nature of Arab political thought and deserve a special monograph.

13. Namely, Ben-Gurion may retort on a higher level of violence as he possesses what Herman Kahn calls 'escalation dominance'. Nasser implies here what is called 'deterrence by escalation' or the playing of an 'anti-game'. The last expression is from Klaus Knorr and Thornton Read, *Limited Strategic War* (New York and London: Praeger and Pall Mall, 1962), p. 105.

14. For instance, his speech on 10 October 1960.

15. President Nasser: 'The present and the future do not work for Israel but the Arabs' (23 December 1962). Mr Heikal explained that the

Egyptian ability to win an economic competition with Israel was guaranteed by Egypt's economic superiority. Egypt spends five times more on her economic development than Israel does. Egypt develops her economic, industrial and social infrastructure while Israel is driven by her inherent smallness and weakness to concentrate her allocations on defence. He added: 'As the UAR's strength grows, the portion to be set aside for confronting the Israeli danger will diminish; *vice versa* on the other side, as the strength of the UAR increases the means required for Israel to confront the danger will increase' (*Al-Ahram*, 16 March 1962).

16. Bourguiba, too, acknowledged in a memorandum submitted to the second Arab Summit Meeting that he did not dispute the final objective (*Al-Amal*, 30 April 1965, or *Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 1, pp. 185-88).

### 3. Fatah's Doctrine

1. The Syrian Baath Ninth Congress that convened in October 1966, announced: 'The Israel existence within the Arab fatherland forms the main basis that separates the eastern part from the western part of the Arab Nation and constitutes a firm basis for attack in order to safeguard both the interests of Imperialism in this region and the reactionary regimes. It is the main factor halting the economic and social development of the Arab Nation, leaving it fragmented and divided. It is the direct danger which threatens continuously to swallow other parts of the Arab fatherland and suppress their Arabness. So long as the Zionist existence continues, all victories achieved by Arab masses will be partial and liable to be lost.' (*Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 2, p. 481. The same formulation is found in the book by General Talas, the present Syrian Chief of Staff, *Guerrilla War*, p. 13.)

General Talas enumerates the dangers facing the Arab World (Palestine, Alexandretta, Yemen, South Yemen, the Gulf) concluding that: 'the Palestine issue is foremost in all these challenges which are embodied in these dangers and is the practical beginning of the liberation of the Arab nation and its unification'. *Guerrilla War*, p. 13.

2. General Talas stressed that the goal of achieving material superiority was impractical, as the West would aid Israel to keep the balance:



'The present experience confirmed in a way that precludes any doubt that the material superiority over the enemy in modern weaponry as required for classical war is impossible while America, Britain and West Germany open wide the doors of their arsenals so that Israel may help herself to whatever she likes without accounts' (*Guerrilla War*, p. 15).

3. The importance of the argument of the factor of time can be learnt from *Fatah's* assertion in its very first communiqué (beginning of January 1965) that time is unfavourable to the Arabs. It was the main justification for their emergence (*Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 1, p. 2).

4. In a memorandum to the Third Summit Meeting, *Fatah* said: 'The *Fatah* movement resolved that the battle should be today not tomorrow since procrastinations will cause the Arabs not only to miss the opportunities of victory, but will make them miss, once and for all, the opportunities of waging a battle, because the possible eventual acquisition by Israel of an atom bomb, or other weapons of irregular capabilities, will constitute a standing argument by the defeatists, whose number grows continuously in the Arab fatherland with the multiplication of misfortunes and disappointments' (*Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 1, p. 481).

5. Despite the effort to keep away from anti-Semitism, the politicized attitude pushes *Fatah* to consider the state of Israel as fundamentally evil so that it deserves a death verdict. Its odium is the outcome of bad characteristics usually attributed by anti-Semitism to the Jews. In *Fatah's* official journal, *Al-Thaura Al-Falistiniya* (No. 3, January 1968, p. 10) it is stated, in bold type and within a frame, that *Fatah's* mission has a universalist nature to prevent 'other people being evicted by the Nazi-Zionism, whose ambition is world domination'. Thus *Fatah* adopts the anti-Semitic accusation that the Jews aspire to establish a government to dominate the world, which is the main theme of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*. This accusation is transferred to Israel.

6. This accusation is prevalent to the extent that Anis Qasim saw a need to counteract it. *Revolutionary Preparation for the Battle of Liberation*, p. 332.

7. A straightforward formulation of the Arab position on the impossibility of coexistence is found in Lutfi al-Khuli's article in the February 1968 issue of *Al-Tali'a*, the ideological organ of

the Arab Socialist Union. Its editor, Al-Khuli, explains that between Zionism and Arab Nationalism there is a contradiction like that between water and fire. Its resolution can be either by water extinguishing fire, or by fire evaporating water.

The Egyptian troops were taught that 'the contradiction between the Arabs and Israel is so fundamental that a compromise is impossible. Negotiations are possible when there is a meeting point on which both sides can agree. However, nothing short of the Liberation of Palestine will satisfy the Arabs, as nothing but the continuation of its existence will satisfy Israel.' UAR Armed Forces Indoctrination Directorate, *The United Reference Book for National Orientation*, Vol. 2, 1965, p. 24.

8. It should be noted that *Fatah* did not publish a pamphlet summarizing the Algerian experience.

9. Like Fanon and Debray, *Fatah's* leaders criticize the cities' bourgeois political leaders, though they themselves probably stem from these circles.

#### 4. Debate and Action

1. A convenient concentrated statement of the Jordanian views is found in the Jordanian Government publication: *Jordan, the Palestine Issue and Arab Relations*, in Arabic (Amman, 1962).

2. For example, N. Alush, *The Road to Palestine*, p. 175, gives a concentrated list of President Nasser's oscillations.

3. President Nasser: 'The Liberation of Yemen is a step towards getting rid of Zionism' (23 November 1962).

4. For example, Proclamation of 1 April 1966; Dr Atasi's speech of 7 April 1966, *Documents on Palestine*, Vol. 2, pp. 135, 138.

#### 5. Fedayeen after the Six-day War

1. The motivation for joining a *Fedayeen* organization is mixed. Between the two poles of national-ideological and mercenary motives there is probably a wide range of other considerations: protest, adventurism, escape from personal predicament. For Arab students abroad, joining may be a way of escaping from disappointment of



poor academic achievements. The number of drop-outs from those making contact to those participating in action is probably high.

2. On the afternoon of 4 June, in 3 hours of shelling, damage to the value of about 300,000 Israel pounds was caused to settlements in the Jordan Valley (Israeli Chief Education Officer Monthly Survey, No. 5, 1968).

3. The order of magnitude of the factor of exaggeration is of several scores. An engagement near Jericho in which one Israeli soldier was killed and two soldiers wounded was reported in the Voice of Al-'asifa on 25 May 1968 as resulting in 120 casualties.

The Lebanese paper *Al-Anwar* published on 5 June 1968 a letter from a *Fedayeen* officer claiming that since 1965 the *Fedayeen* killed 7,000 Israelis and destroyed 700 vehicles and demolished 600 installations.

4. Mr Baha al-Din finds the main weakness of the Arabs in vagueness and inability to look at the facts of reality (*Al-Musawwar*, 3 November 1967). Such self-reproach is frequent. Exaggerations may be an outcome of this tendency to unrealism.

5. The Syrian *Al-Thaura* calls this phenomenon the 'stealing of announcements' (2 October 1968).

6. Expressing forebodings about *Fedayeen* exaggerated reporting recurs in the Arab press. For example, Kanafani in *Al-Anwar*, 5 May 1968, 1 July 1968; *Al-Hawadeth*, 21 June 1968; Heikal in *Al-Ahram*, 15 August 1968; *Al-Huriya*, 9 September 1968; *Amman al-Masaa*, 8 October 1968.

7. As 'Inad ibn Zahid explained, the people demand that the battle for 'the liquidation of the traces of aggression' would be followed by the battle for 'the liquidation of the source of aggression' (*Amman al-Masaa*, 2 September 1968).

8. Such a presentation may be genuine from the Egyptian point of view. However, Israel cannot consent to such a differentiation of a national split personality and demand that the UAR assume an integral position. Otherwise Egypt as Arab would reserve the right to continue the military struggle or support it, even after a political settlement with Egypt as state.

## 6. Guerrilla Warfare and the New Arab Strategy

1. Such as Walid Khalidi, Qlodwis Maqsd,

Burhan Dajani, Ghasan Kanafani and Shafiq al-Hut.

2. *Fatah's* and the Syrians' usual retort to the argument that the terrain is not suitable for guerrilla warfare is to belittle the terrain factor and accentuate the human factor (*Al-Thaura*, 12 November 1967).

3. The theme that a great psychological warfare campaign is conducted against the Arabs frequently appears in the Arab press. It may reflect a lack of self-confidence projected outwardly and explained as the outcome of a fiendish conspiracy. The relatively high number of publications in Arabic on psychological warfare may indicate a predisposition to believe in its occult power.

4. The next war will end, it is described, either in Arab victory or a total collapse from which Arab nationalism will not be able to recover. An indication that people's nerves and especially the military are wearing out in their impatience for a showdown is found in Mr Murad's article in *Al-Tali'a* of June 1968.

## 7. Living with the Conflict

1. Arab spokesmen object to the classification of the *Fedayeen* activities as terrorism. On the other hand, in justifying these activities to foreigners they invoke the precedent of Jewish terrorism against the British Mandate. It is interesting to note the Jews did not mince their terms and mostly acknowledged that their activities were terrorism.

2. In his article in *Al-Ahram* of 20 September 1968 Mr Heikal stressed that the war between Egypt and Israel would be a war between states and not a War of National Liberation as in Vietnam or Algeria. Guerrilla warfare in Sinai, he explained, was suicidal. He added that the next war would be a long one in which Egypt would take the offensive.

3. I described this weakness in an article 'Basic Factors in the Arab Collapse in the Six-Day War', *Orbis*, Vol. XI, No. 3, Fall 1967.

In films and television programmes of *Fedayeen* training, the trainees accompany their motions with a great deal of shouting. Shouting is sometimes used in military training, for instance in bayonet assaulting. Personally, I cannot help feeling that *Fatah's* excessive shouting in training



is motivated, not so much by the purpose of impressing the foreign photographer, as by the need to overcome lack of confidence. Shouting for the individual Arab perhaps has the merit of extracting him from his loneliness, bolstering him up and giving him a feeling of togetherness.

4. The cycle from growth to decay may be rather short. In the Arab press there are already expressions of disgruntlement with the *Fedayeen* organizations. Their failure to achieve unity, their harmful competition and clashes came under heavy fire from the Syrian *Al-Thaura* (2 October 1968). 'The plurality of organizations produces a climate of opportunism and chaos'. It criticized membership of such organizations because of unemployment and a search for a source of permanent income, and the irresponsible behaviour of firing bravado shots in public places. *Al-Nahar* (weekly supplement of 6 October 1968) criticized the thronging of thugs into *Fedayeen* organizations. *Al-Huriya* (9 September 1968) complained that most of the *Fedayeen* activities became 'merely frontier actions'.

Recognition of failure and counsel of despair is sounded by Professor Walid al-Khalidi, namely that Israel occupying additional Arab areas with their population should be welcomed (*Al-Musawwar*, 21 June 1968). Similar ideas are presented in *Al-Huriya*, 2 September 1968. As if the size of the present Arab population and the areas which come under Israel's control are inadequate to foster hostile action.

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